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RAMOS

HOPE

C R I M I N A L M I S S I O N TM



VOLUME TWO

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CRIMSON™

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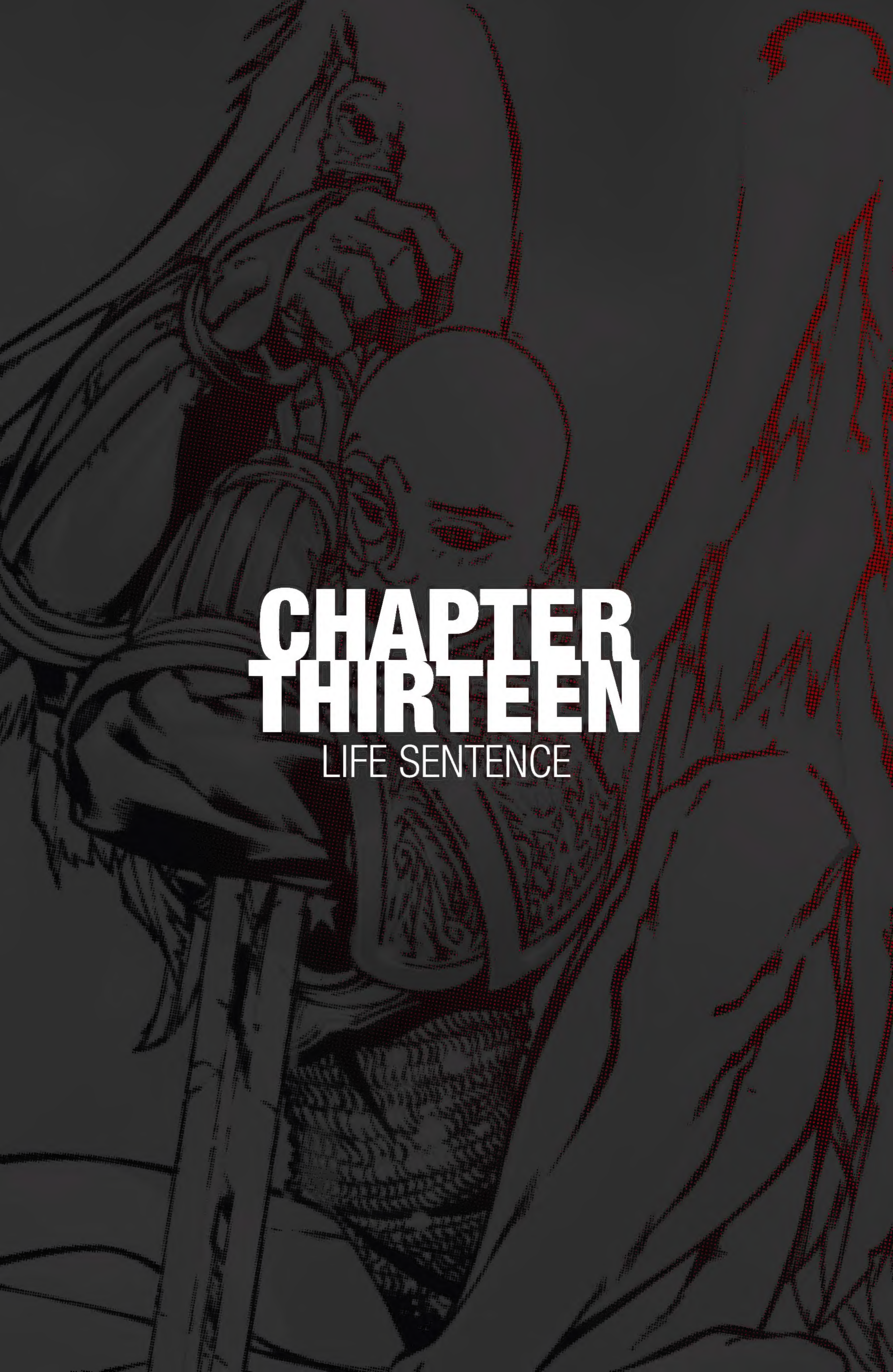
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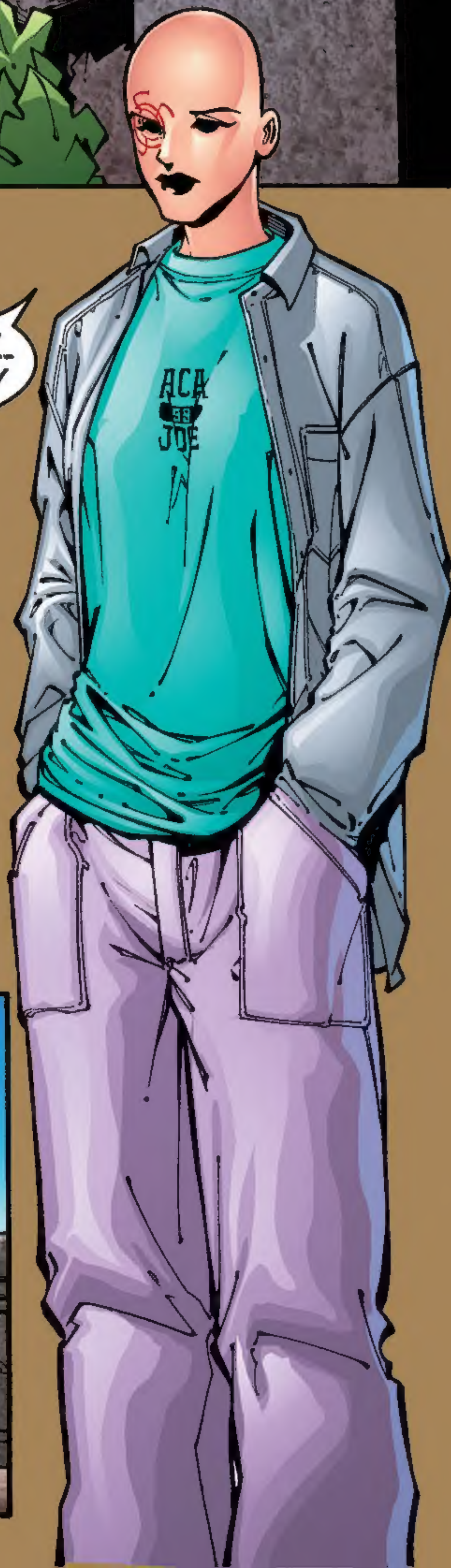
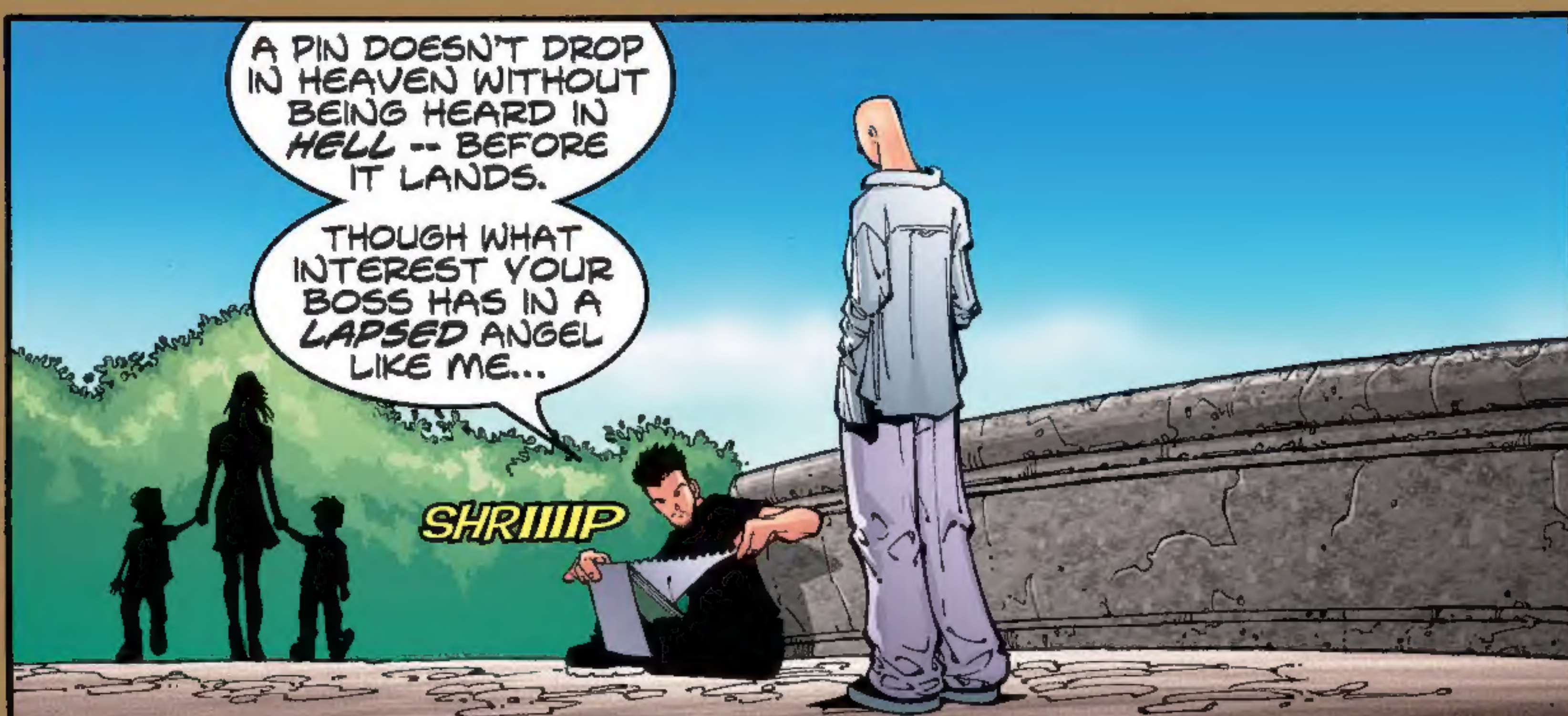


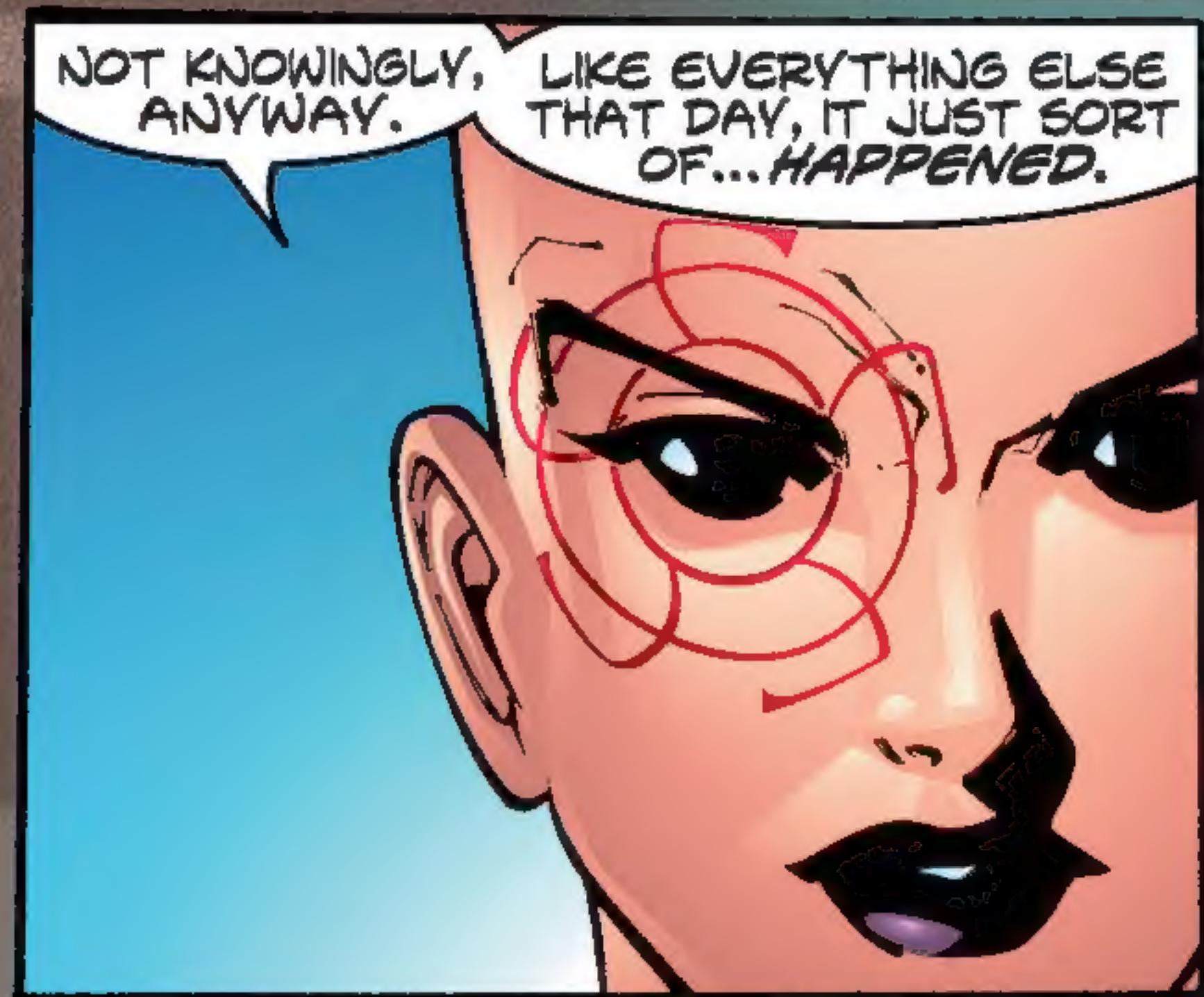
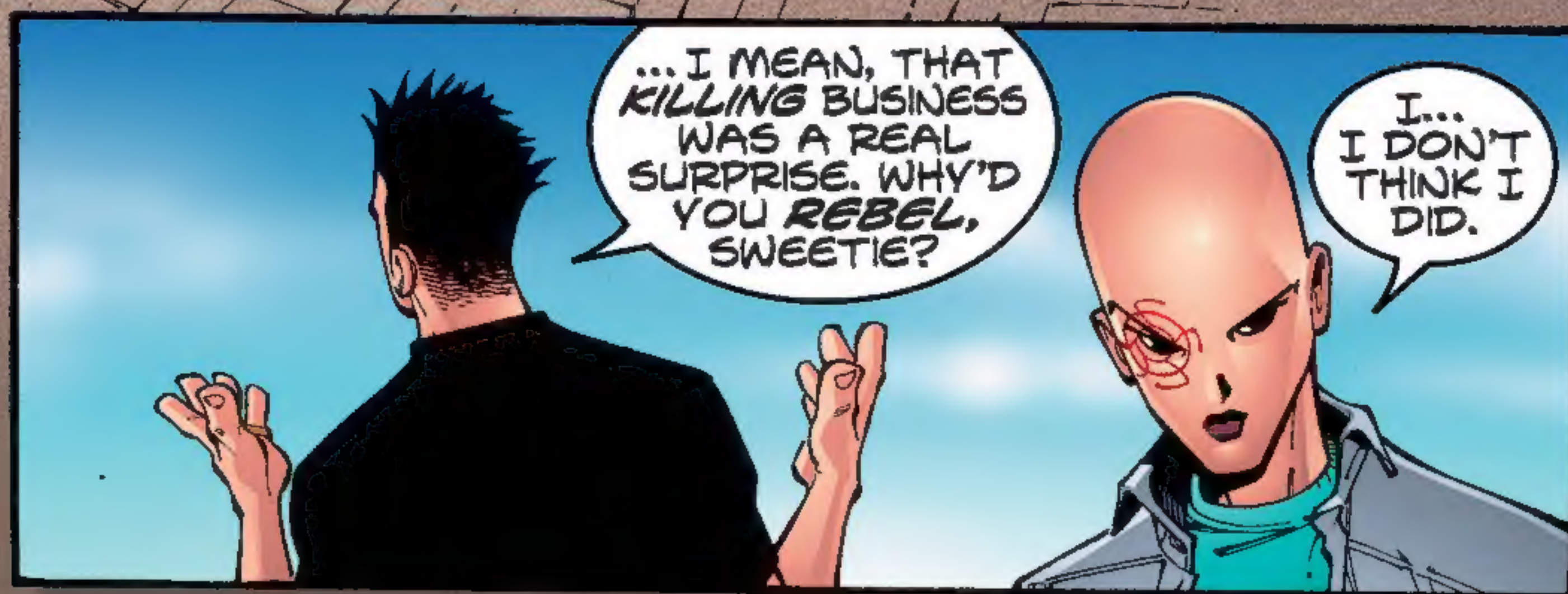
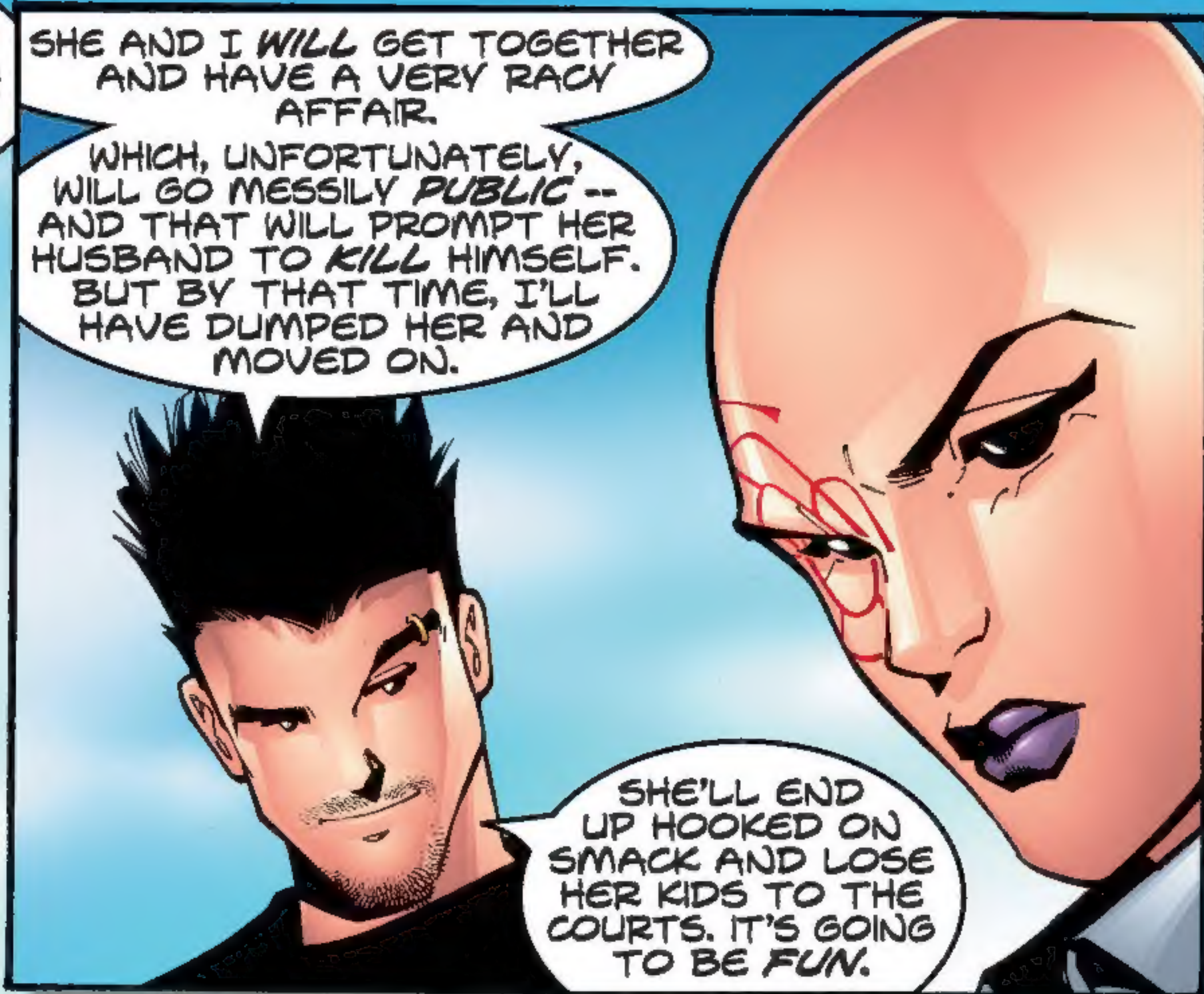
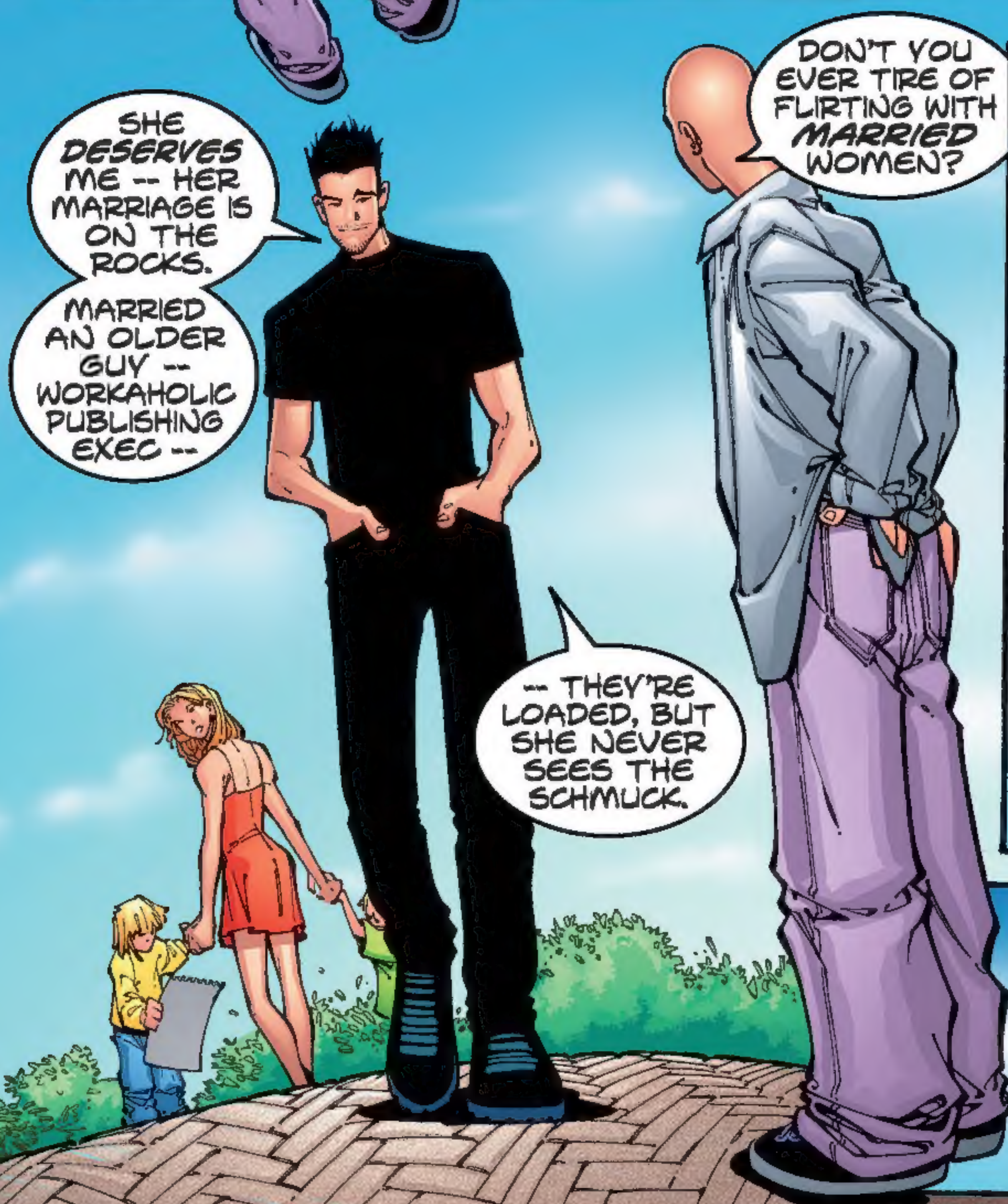
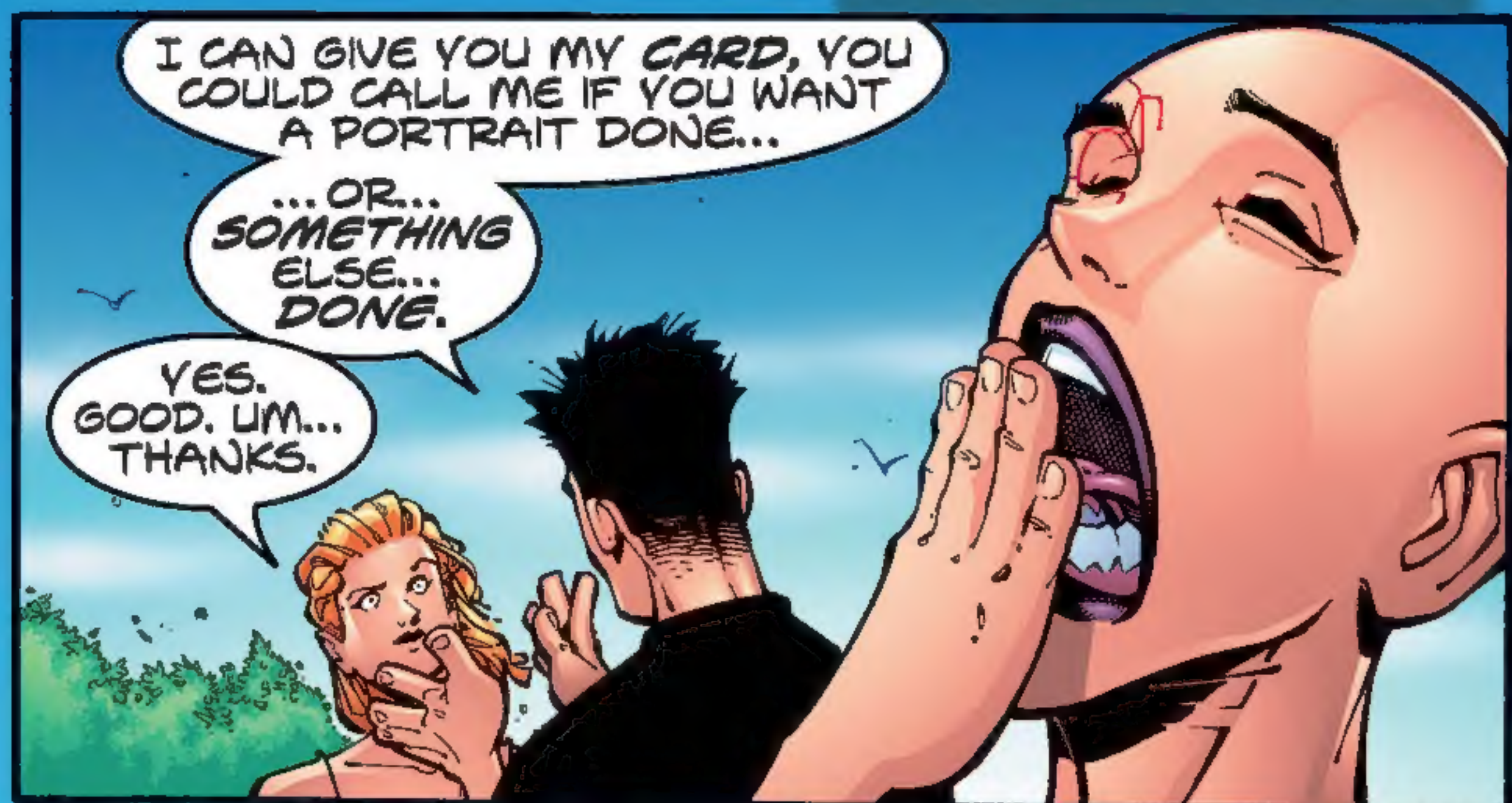
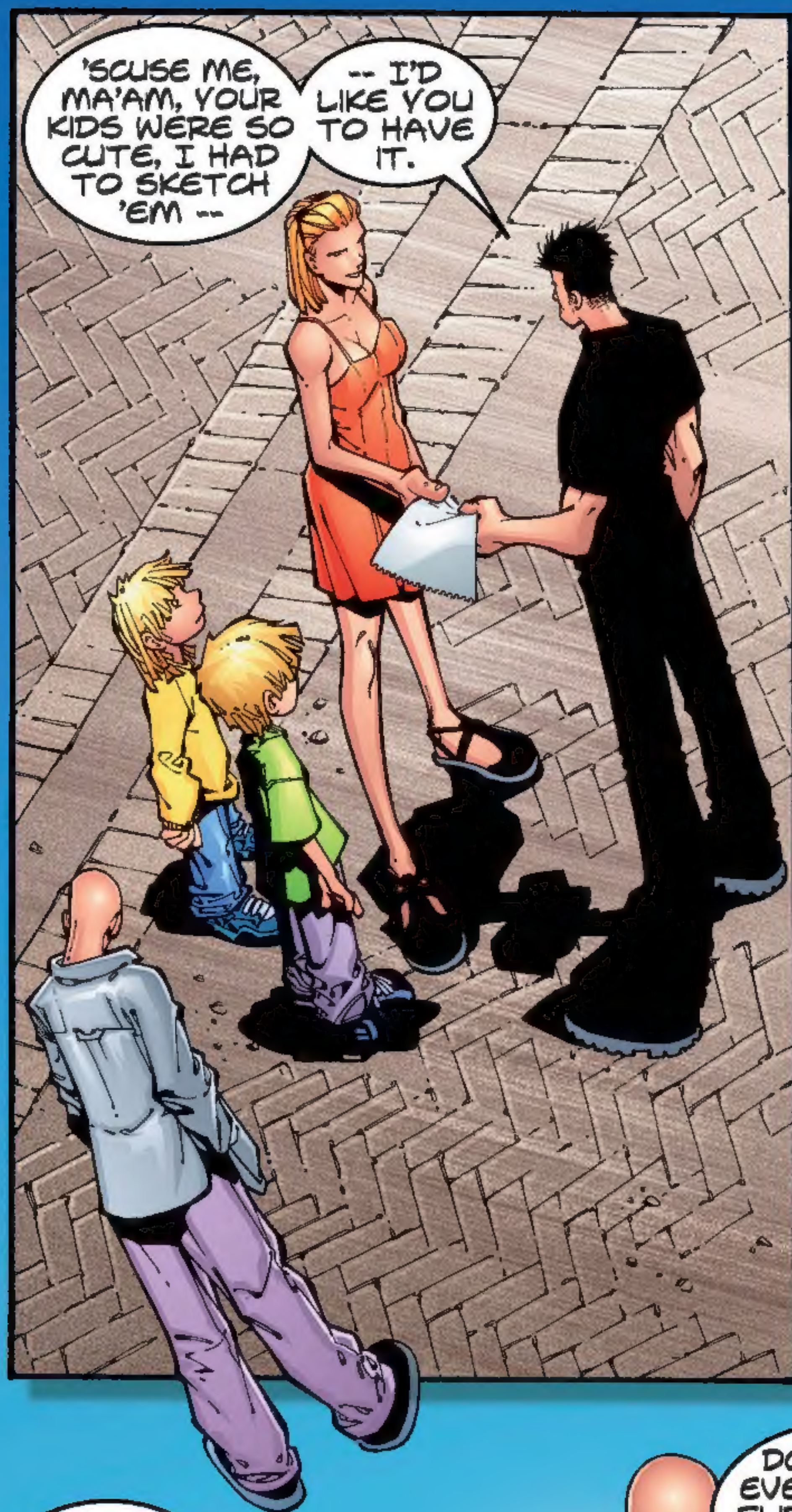
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LIFE SENTENCE

NEW YORK'S
CENTRAL
PARK.

A RARE AND BEAUTIFUL
LATE SUMMER AFTERNOON...





"DID IT START ON THAT **GLORIOUS** DAY OF **CREATION** WHEN GOD TOLD US TO WORSHIP AND SERVE **HUMANS**?"

"I DON'T THINK SO. A LOT OF US -- **ME** ESPECIALLY -- NEVER HAD A PROBLEM WITH THE **COMMANDMENT**. WE ALREADY LOVED EVERY **MOLECULE** OF CREATION.

"IF THERE WAS A MOMENT IN TIME WHEN EVERYTHING JUST SORT OF BROKE LOOSE AND CRASHED, IT WAS **THAT NIGHT**...

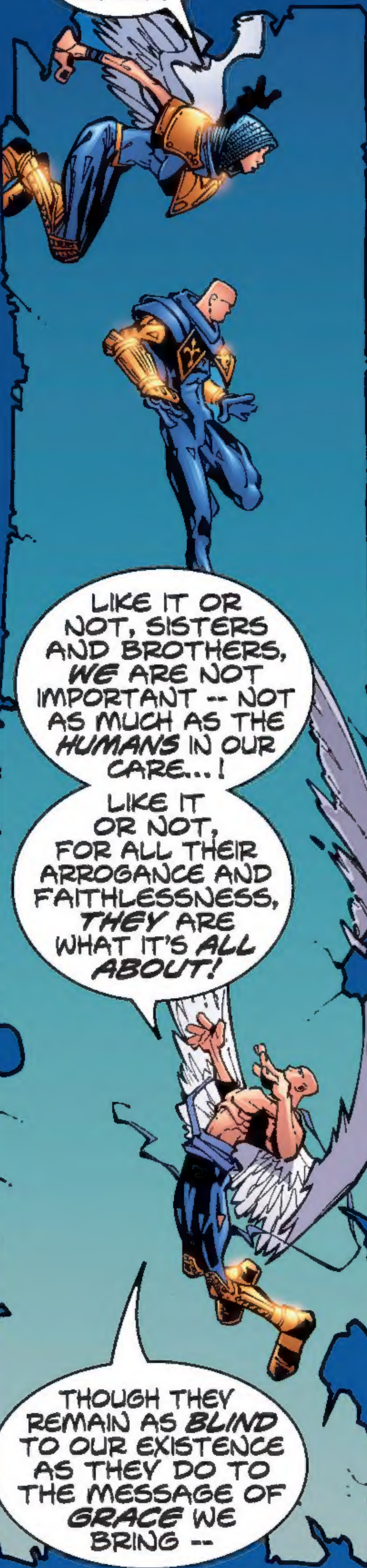
"... **ERIEL'S LAST NIGHT**."



HO, ERIEL -- WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

THE LIBRARY. READING TILlich AGAIN.

HE'S GOING TO **PREACH** -- TELL IT, ERIEL!



LIKE IT OR NOT, SISTERS AND BROTHERS, **WE** ARE NOT IMPORTANT -- NOT AS MUCH AS THE **HUMANS** IN OUR CARE...!

LIKE IT OR NOT, FOR ALL THEIR ARROGANCE AND FAITHLESSNESS, **THEY** ARE WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT!

THOUGH THEY REMAIN AS **BLIND** TO OUR EXISTENCE AS THEY DO TO THE MESSAGE OF **GRACE** WE BRING --



-- WE MUST **GLADLY** PERSEVERE WITH THEM...



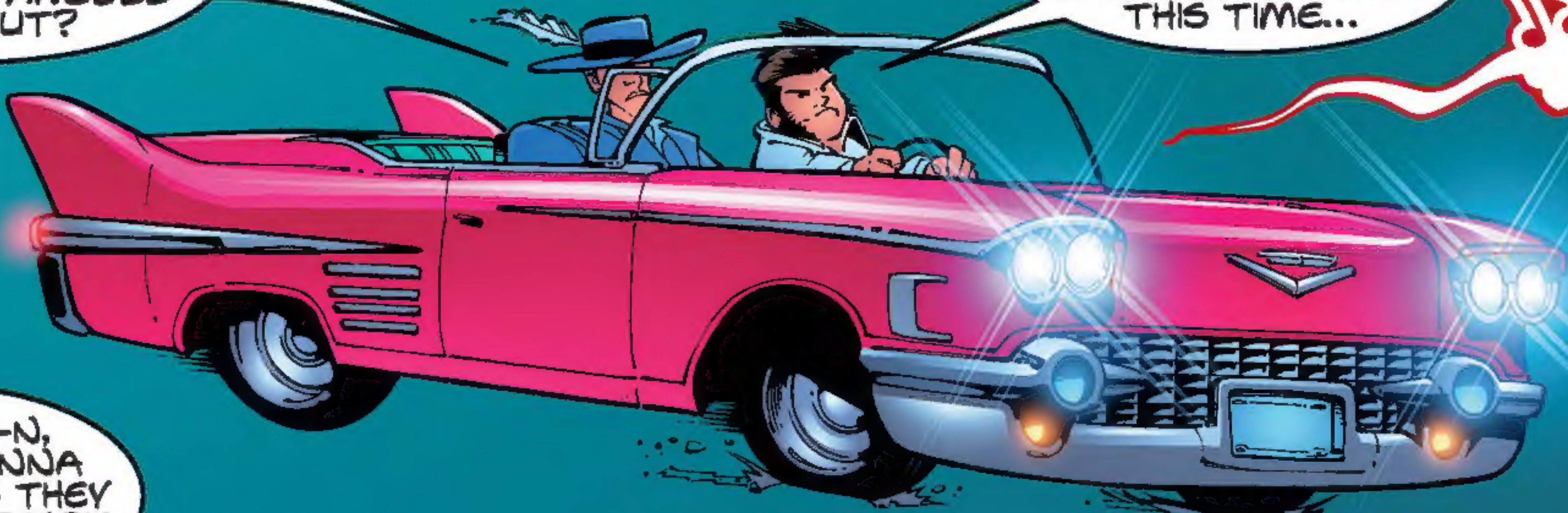
... FOR BY THE **CREATOR'S** INFINITE LOVE, THAT IS OUR **PURPOSE**! WE MUST EVER BE PERFECT REFLECTIONS OF THAT **LOVE** TO THE HUMANS ON EARTH!

SKREECH

HONK HONK

SO, SEÑOR HELLVIS,
YOUR INFORMATION IS
GOOD? THIS OLD CHURCH
IS WHERE THE ANGELS
HANG OUT?

THAT'S RIGHT,
BENNY BOY, EV'RY
EVENING AT ABOUT
THIS TIME...

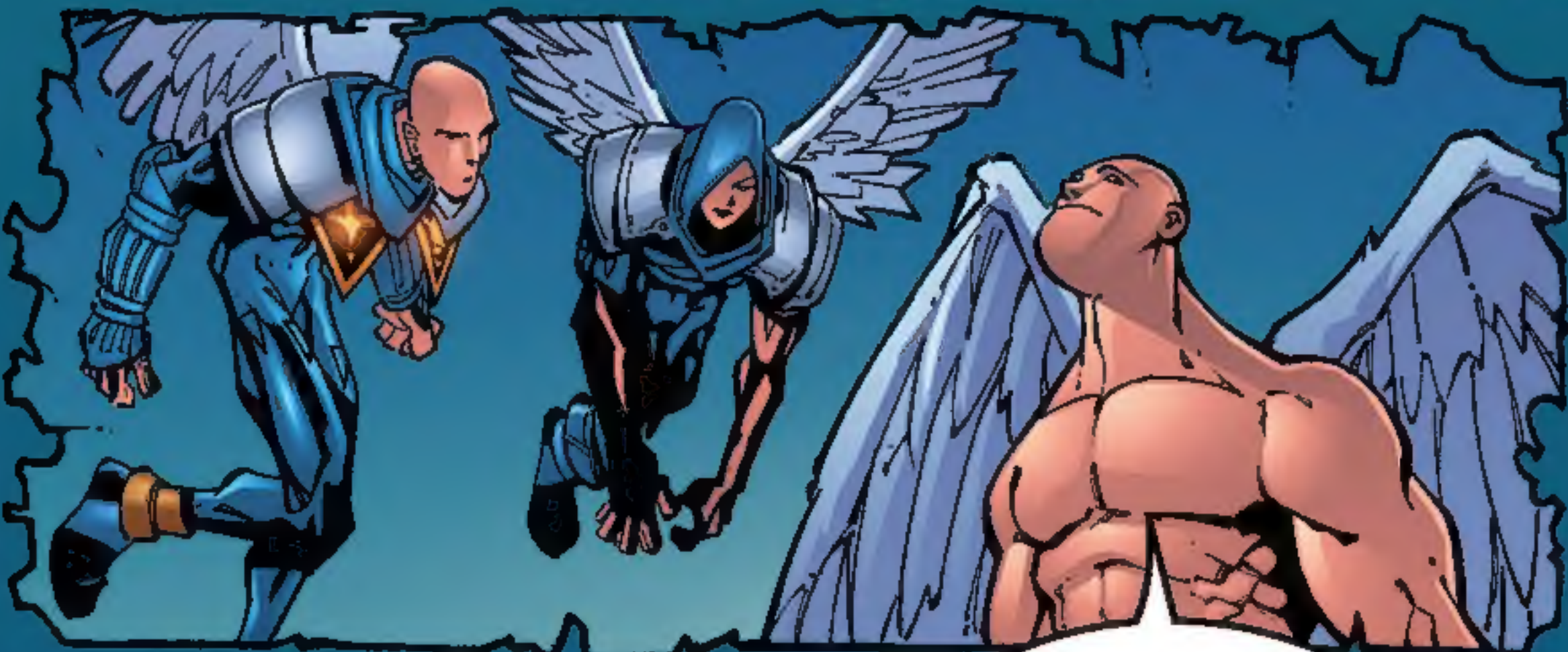
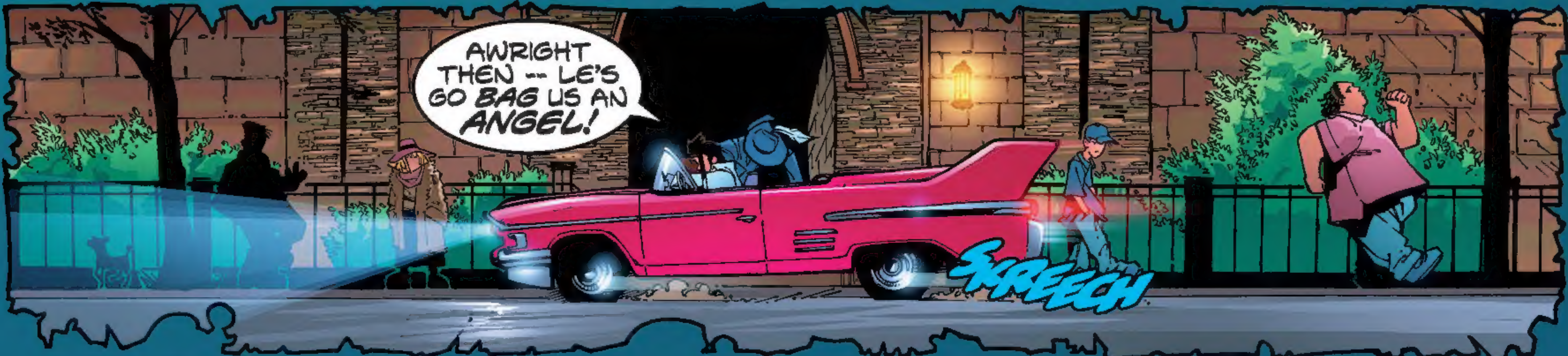


OH, MA-A-N,
THIS IS GONNA
BE SWEET -- THEY
PAY BIG MONEY
FOR ANGELS!

HARDAWAY
AND VALDEZ,
BOUNTY HUNTERS
OF THE BIZARRE,
ARE GONNA BE
SET! ALL THANKS
TO YOU, MY
FRIEN'...

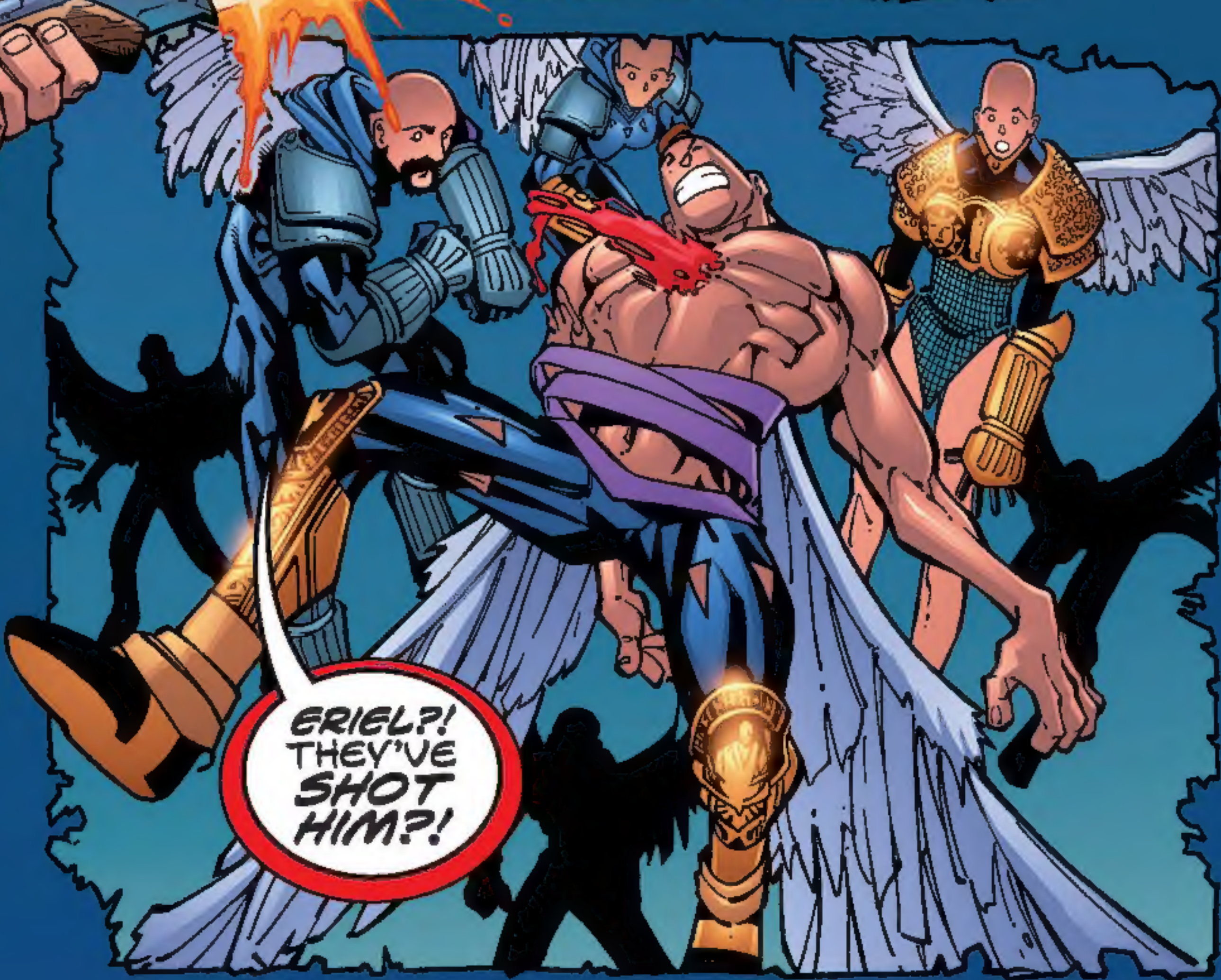


THANG'
YEW
VER'MUSH --
IT'S A
GIFT...



... WE LIVE TO
LOVE AND SERVE
HUMANITY, OR
WE LIVE FOR NO
REASON AT ALL --
AND WE MIGHT
AS WELL BE
DEA --

THERE'S
A BIG
HEALTHY
ONE...



ERIEP?!
THEY'VE
SHOT
HIM?!



YA GOT US
A GOOD ONE,
M'MAN. HE'S
GOTTA BE
TWO HUNDRED
POUNDS!



ZOPHIEL --?

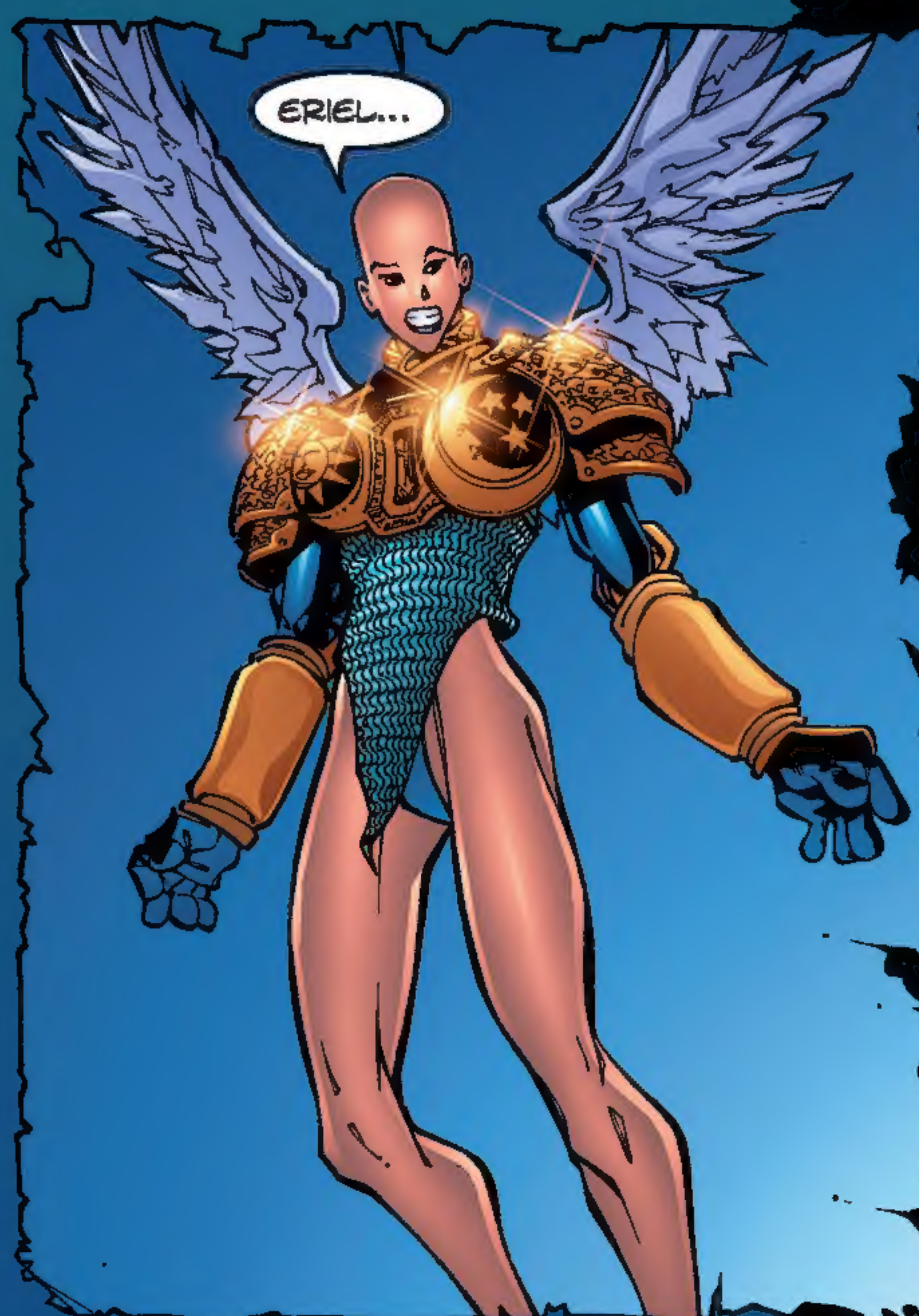
IT'S
IMPOSSIBLE,
THE HUMANS
CAN'T SEE
US!

THEY DON'T
EVEN SEE HIM
LYING NEAR
DEAD AT THEIR
FEET!

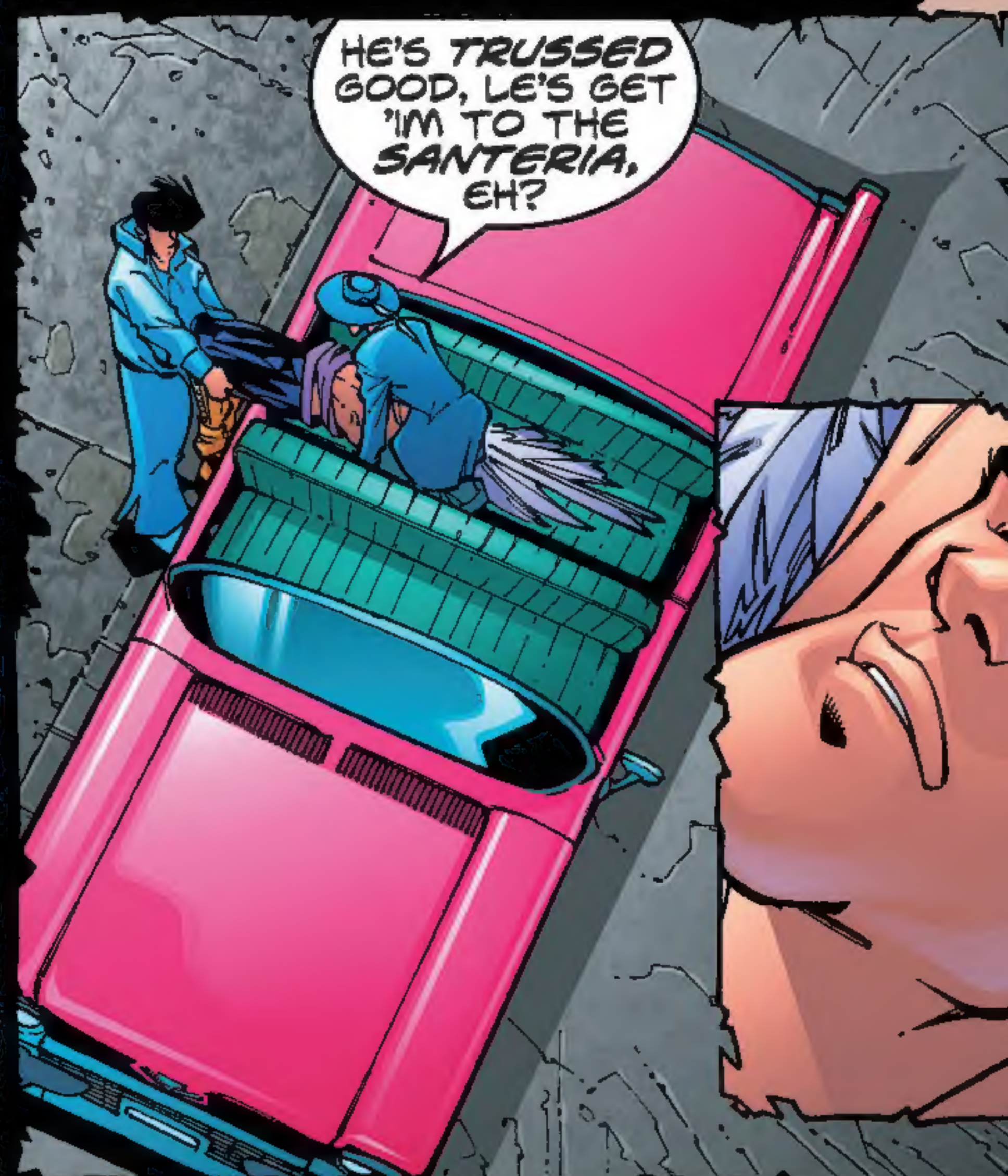


THESE
SPECS REALLY
WORK, HELLV --
SAW 'IM PLAIN
AS DAY!

TOL' YA --
NOW LET'S COLLECT
OUR PRIZE... IF HE
DIES, THEY'LL ALL
SEE HIM.



ERIEL...



HE'S TRUSSED
GOOD, LET'S GET
'IM TO THE
SANTERIA,
EH?





ERIEL -- **NO!**

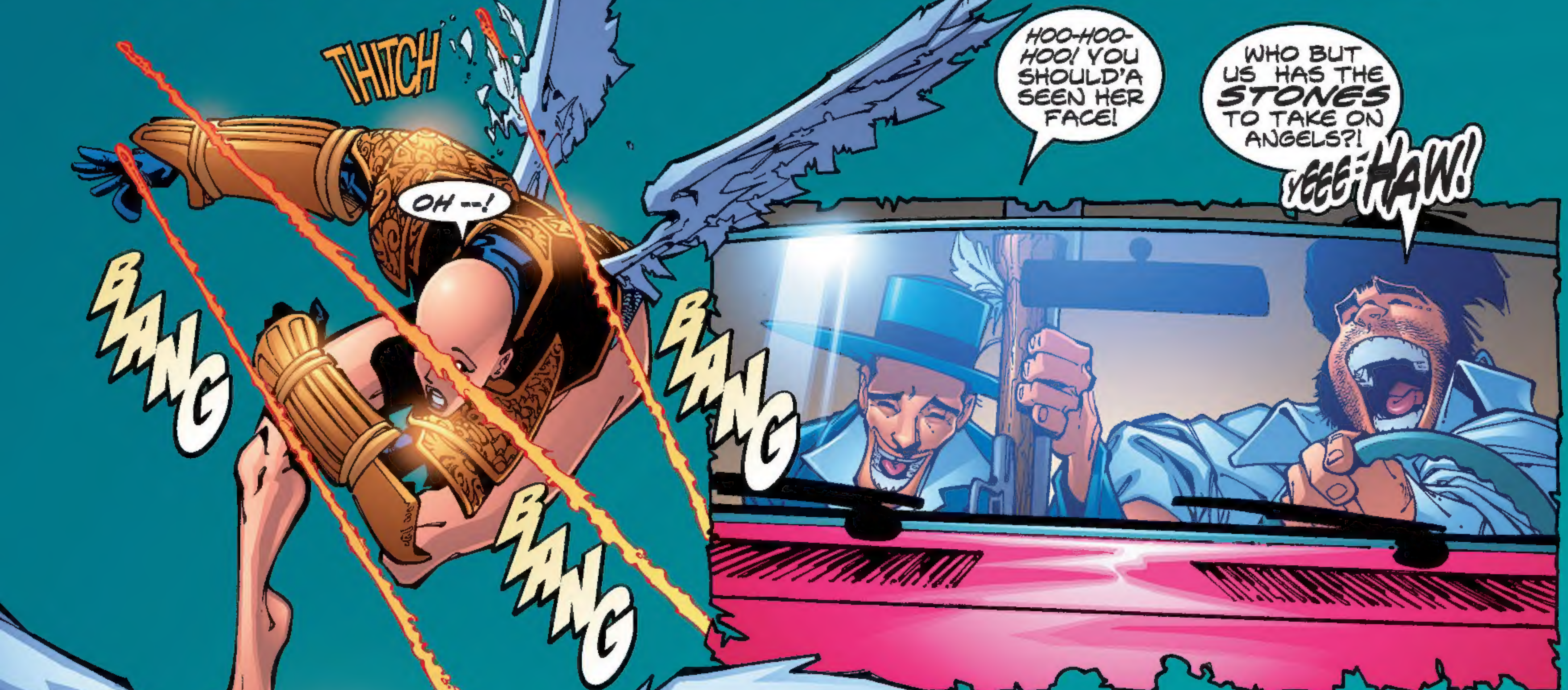
WE GOT
A TAIL --
HEH-HEH...

SQUEEEEEELL



NOT FOR
LONG...

GO GET
'ER, TIGER --
AH-HAH-HAH-
HAH!



THITCH

OH --!

BANG

BANG

BANG

HOO-HOO-
HOO! YOU
SHOULD'A
SEEN HER
FACE!

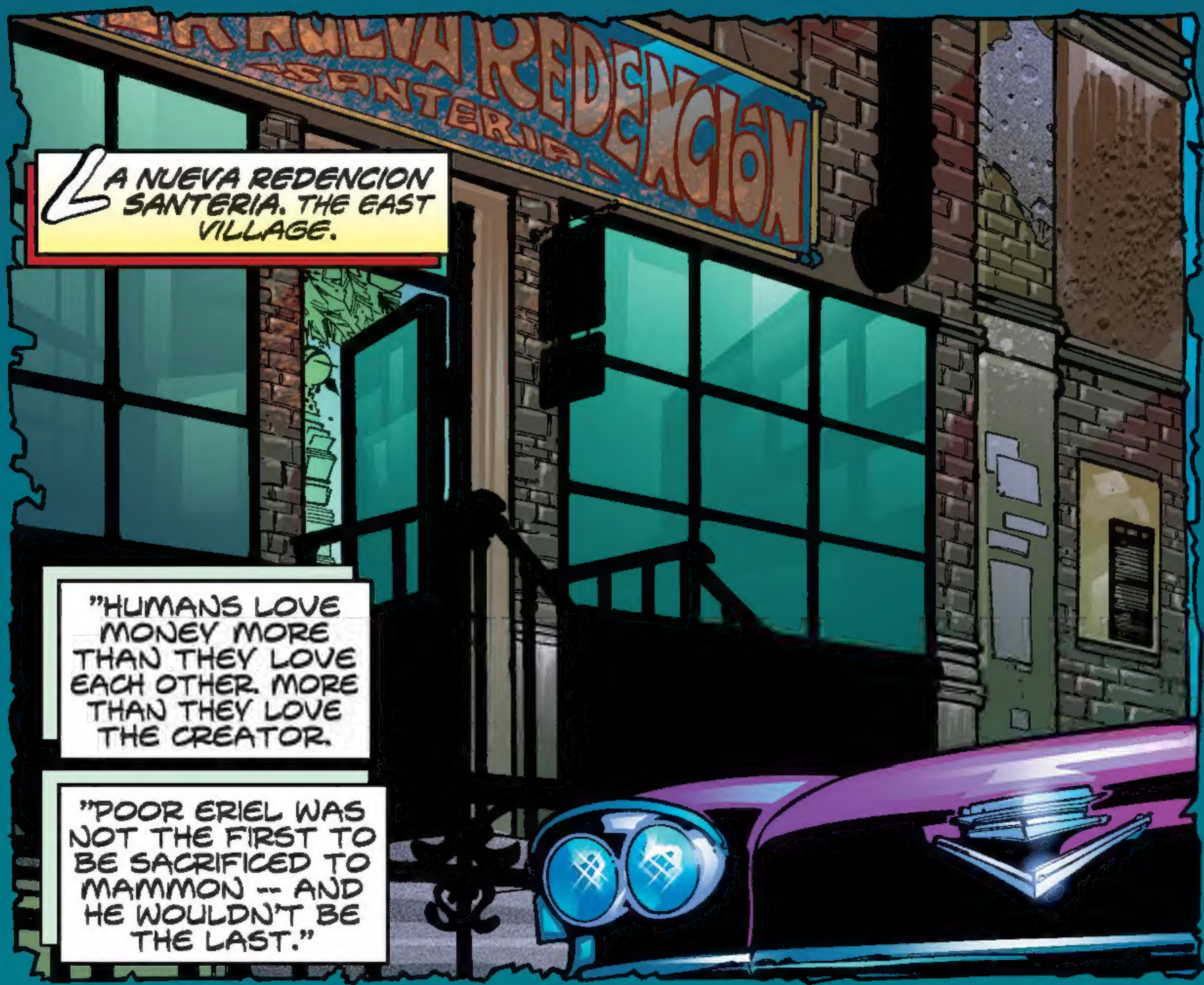
WHO BUT
US HAS THE
STONES
TO TAKE ON
ANGELS?

VEEE-HAW!



FOOLS.
ANGELS' SENSES
ARE FAR GREATER
THAN THEY REALIZE --
I DON'T HAVE TO
BE CLOSE TO
FOLLOW!

AND I
WILL FOLLOW --
ERIEL'S ABDUCTION
WILL NOT GO
UNAVENGED!



LA NUEVA REDENCIÓN
SANTERIA. THE EAST
VILLAGE.

"HUMANS LOVE
MONEY MORE
THAN THEY LOVE
EACH OTHER. MORE
THAN THEY LOVE
THE CREATOR."

"POOR ERIEL WAS
NOT THE FIRST TO
BE SACRIFICED TO
MAMMON -- AND
HE WOULDN'T BE
THE LAST."



RIGHT
THIS WAY,
GENTLEMEN...
IT'S AN HONOR T'
BE DEALIN' WITH
THE TEMPLARS'
ELITE DRAGON
ORDER.



WHERE IS --?!

I TOL' YOU --
YOU GOTTA WEAR
THE GLASSES,
GUNTHER!



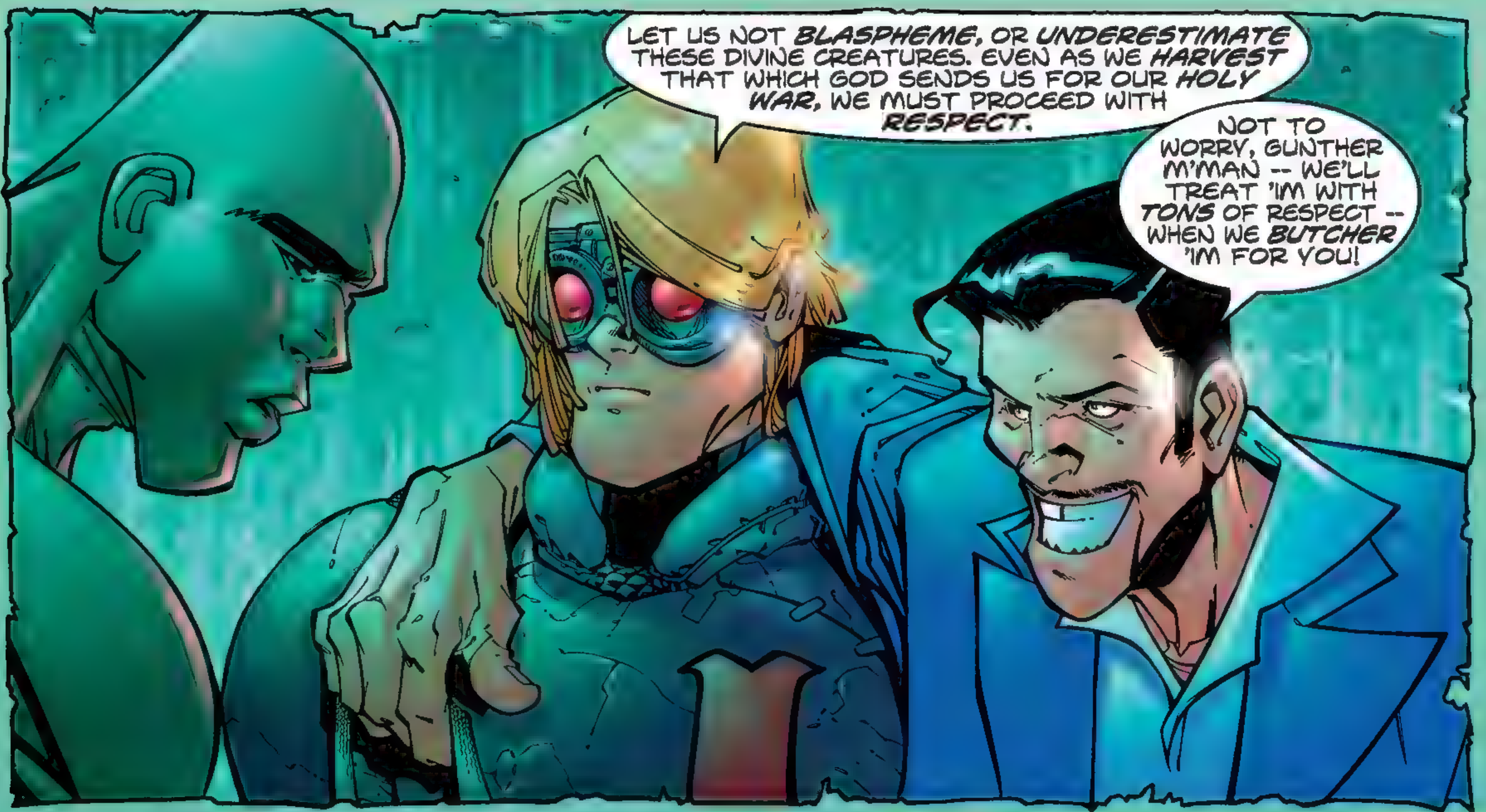
AHH...

AHH! HE IS
MAGNIFICENT!
SUCH A VITAL
SPECIMEN SHOULD
YIELD AN OCEAN OF
BLOOD FOR THE
CHINGUERE
WINE!



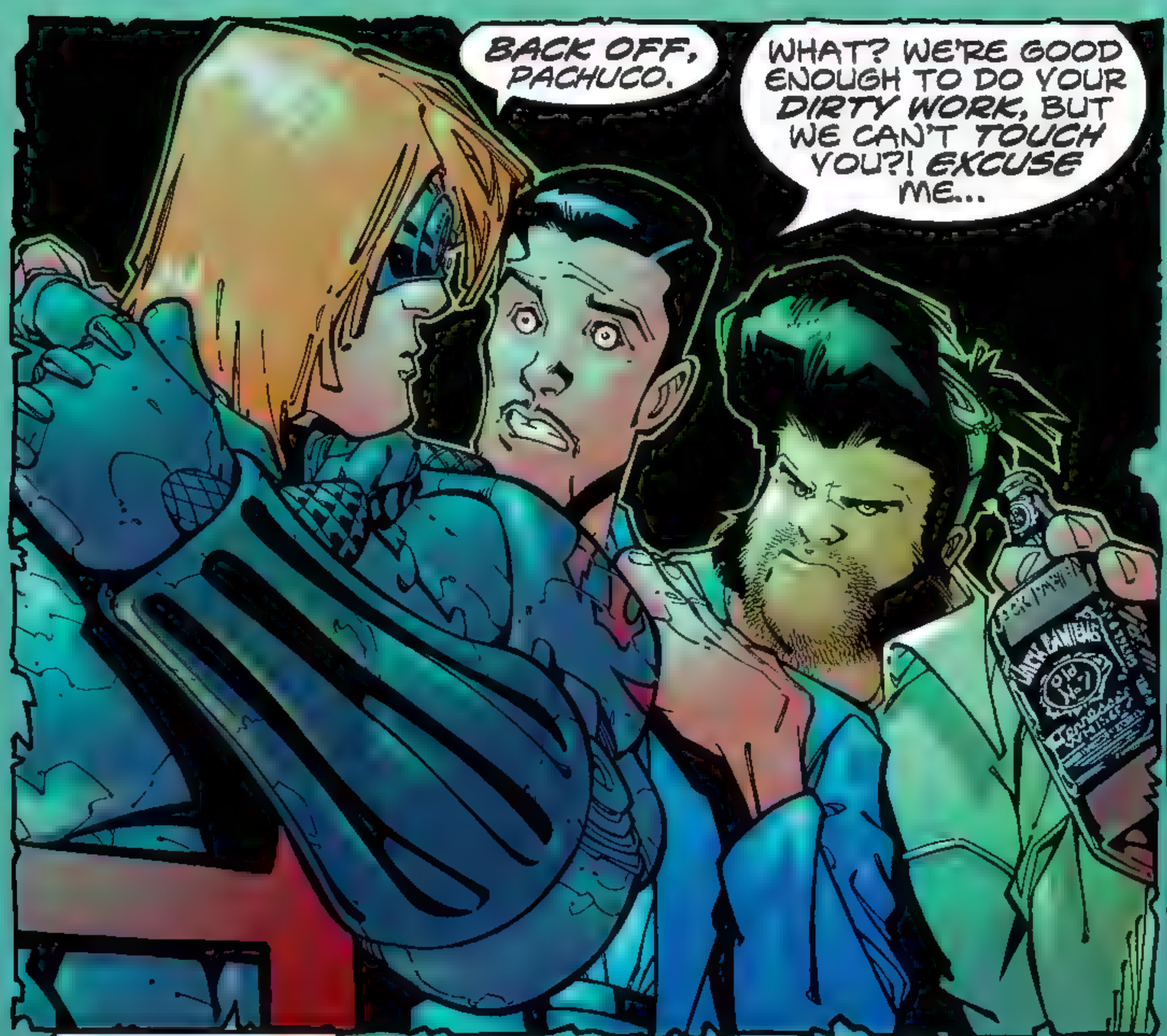
THIP

LE'S NOT
FORGET THE
POWDER YOU GET
FROM GRINDIN' THE
BONES! LOTS OF
JU-JU IN THAT --
IT'S BETTER'N
CRACK!



LET US NOT **BLASPHEME**, OR **UNDERESTIMATE** THESE **DIVINE CREATURES**. EVEN AS WE **HARVEST** THAT WHICH GOD SENDS US FOR OUR **HOLY WAR**, WE MUST PROCEED WITH **RESPECT**.

NOT TO WORRY, GUNTHER M'MAN -- WE'LL TREAT 'IM WITH **TONS OF RESPECT** -- WHEN WE **BUTCHER** 'IM FOR YOU!



BACK OFF, PACHUCO.

WHAT? WE'RE GOOD ENOUGH TO DO YOUR **DIRTY WORK**, BUT WE CAN'T TOUCH YOU?! **EXCUSE ME...**



YEAH! WIT'OUT US BRINGIN' YOU **ANGEL PRODUCT** -- YOU GOTTA FIGHT YOUR "**HOLY WAR**" **SOBER!**

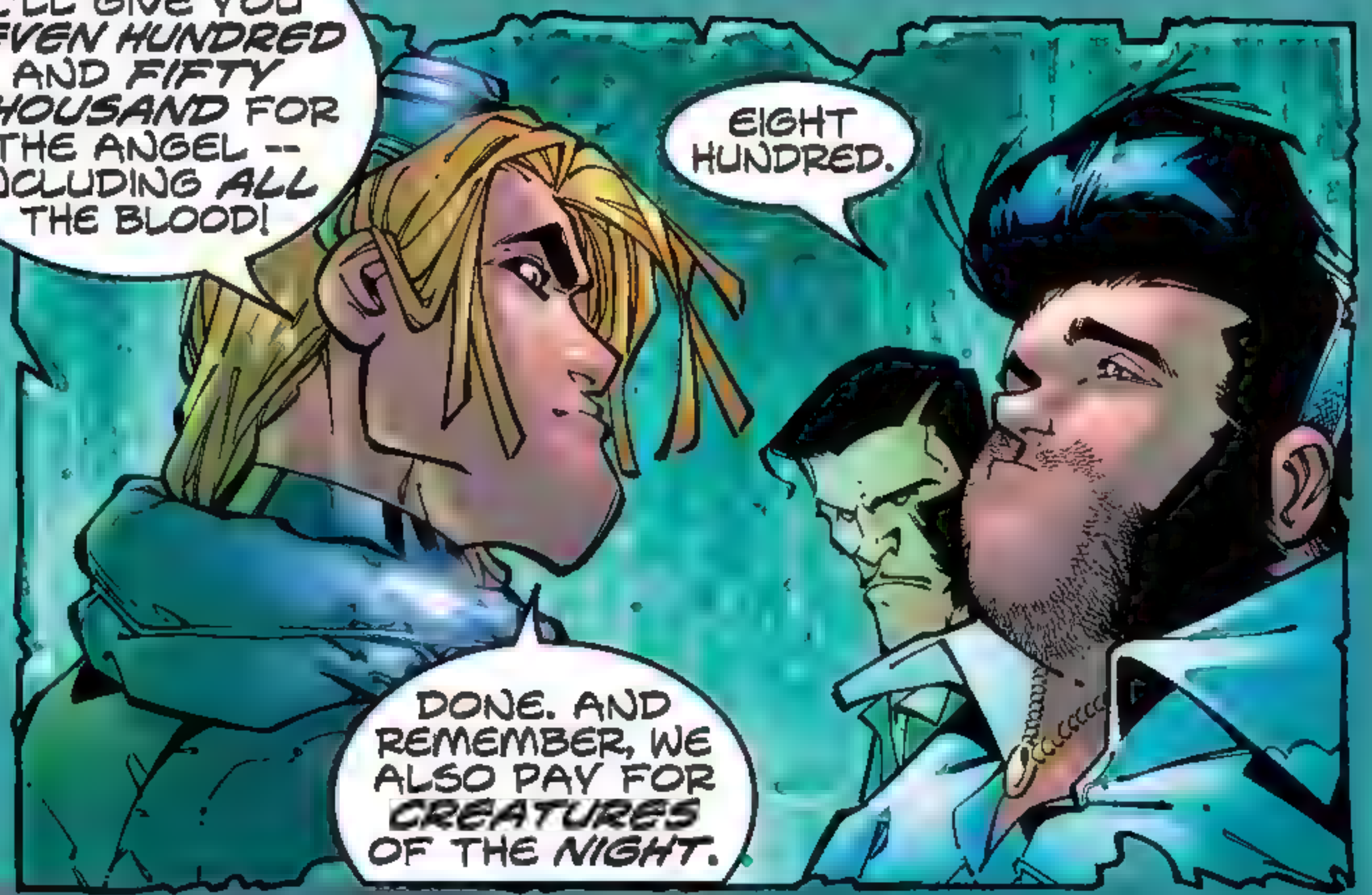
DON' WE **ALWAYS** DO RIGHT BY YOU? DIDN'T WE STEER YOU TO THAT **ROMAN GUY** DOWN MEXICO WAY?



YEAH -- AN' MY KINDA **S.O.B.** AT THAT...

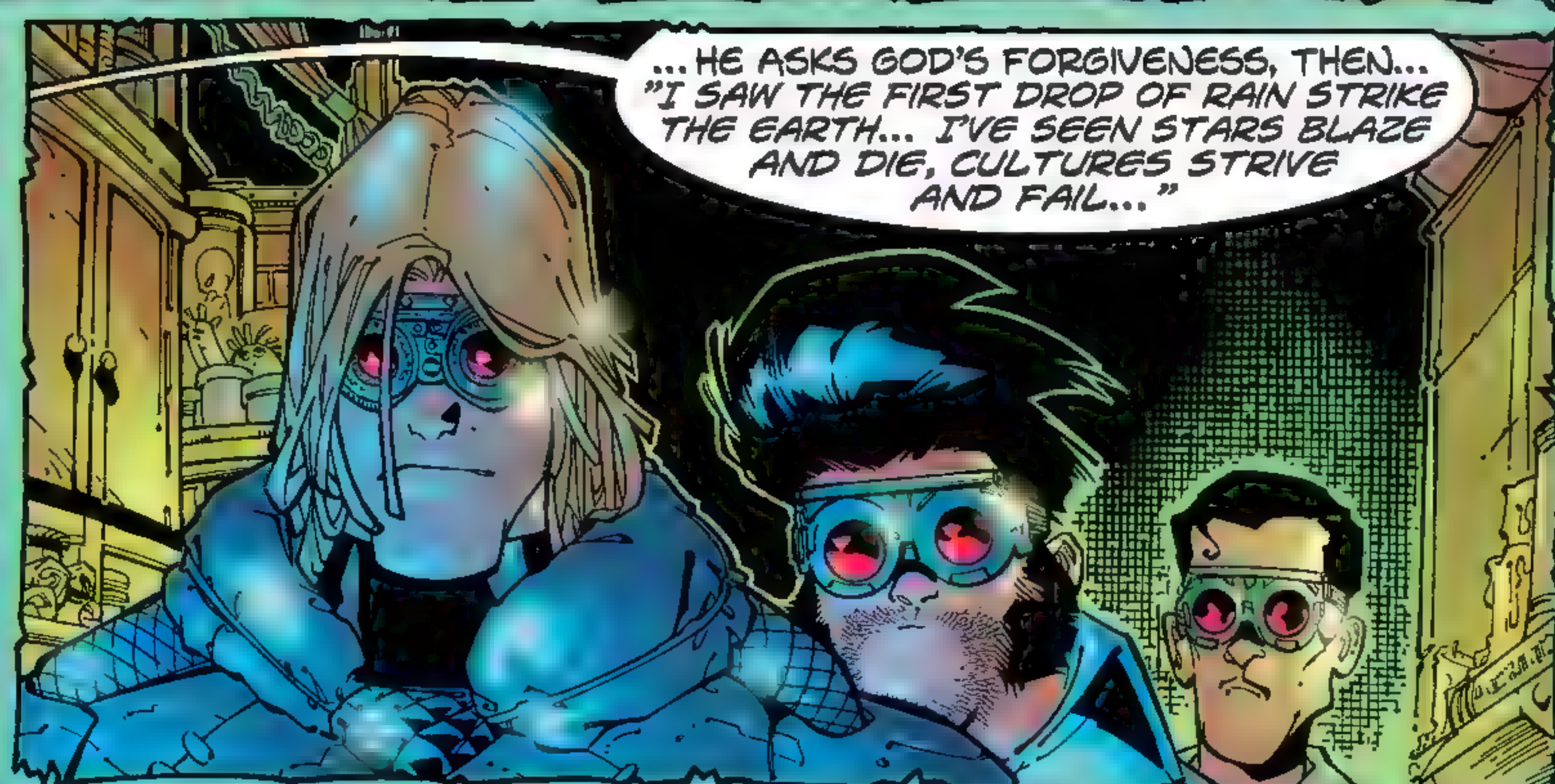
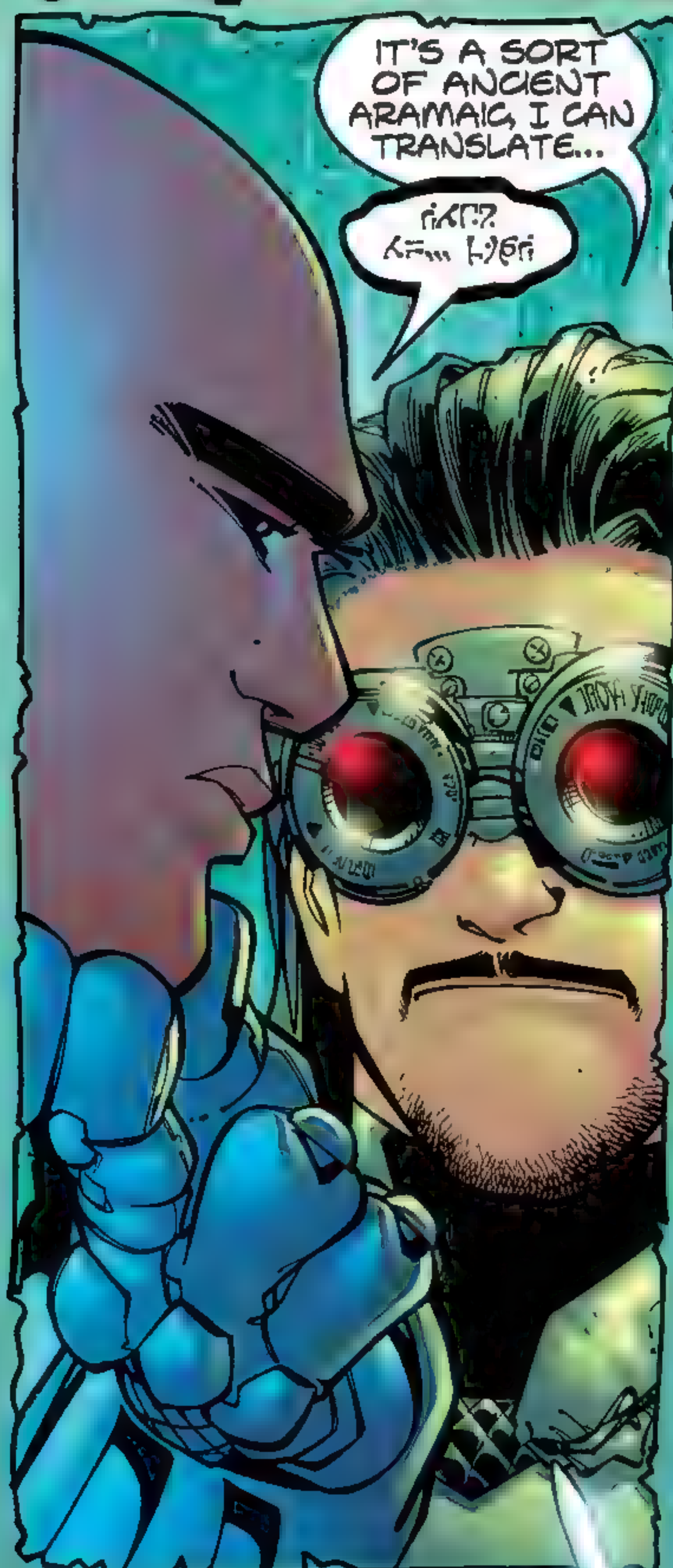
IES UN FREGONI!

WHATEVER, I'LL GIVE YOU **SEVEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND** FOR THE **ANGEL** -- INCLUDING **ALL THE BLOOD!**



EIGHT HUNDRED.

DONE. AND REMEMBER, WE ALSO PAY FOR **CREATURES OF THE NIGHT.**



"I COULD HEAR WHAT NO ONE ELSE COULD --
WHAT NO ONE ELSE EVER *SHOULD*. I
NEEDED HELP, AND *DESTINY* PROVIDED IT..."

AARGH!
GRGL!

OH NO,
NO, NO,
NO...

WELL, STELLA. THE
ANGELS ARE LOOKIN'
AFTER YA -- THAT
WAS GOOD
HOOCH.

LOOKA DIS, ONE
OF US ON THE
RUN. MUST BE
THOSE DAMNED
TEMPLAR
BASTIDS
AGAIN!

OR SOME
SKIN HEAD
RATHOLES ON
THE TEMPLAR
PAYROLL!

G4K
G4K
G4K

YAAAH!
GET THE DEMON-
SCUM!

VRRUUUM

GOT
'IM!

SKEECH



YOU
BREAK
'IM, I'LL
STAKE
'IM!

HURRY
UP AND NAIL
THE LITTLE
BLOOD-
SUCKER,
NEAL!



WHY --
THE STAKE'S
ON FIRE?!

LEAVE
THE VAMPIRE
ALONE!

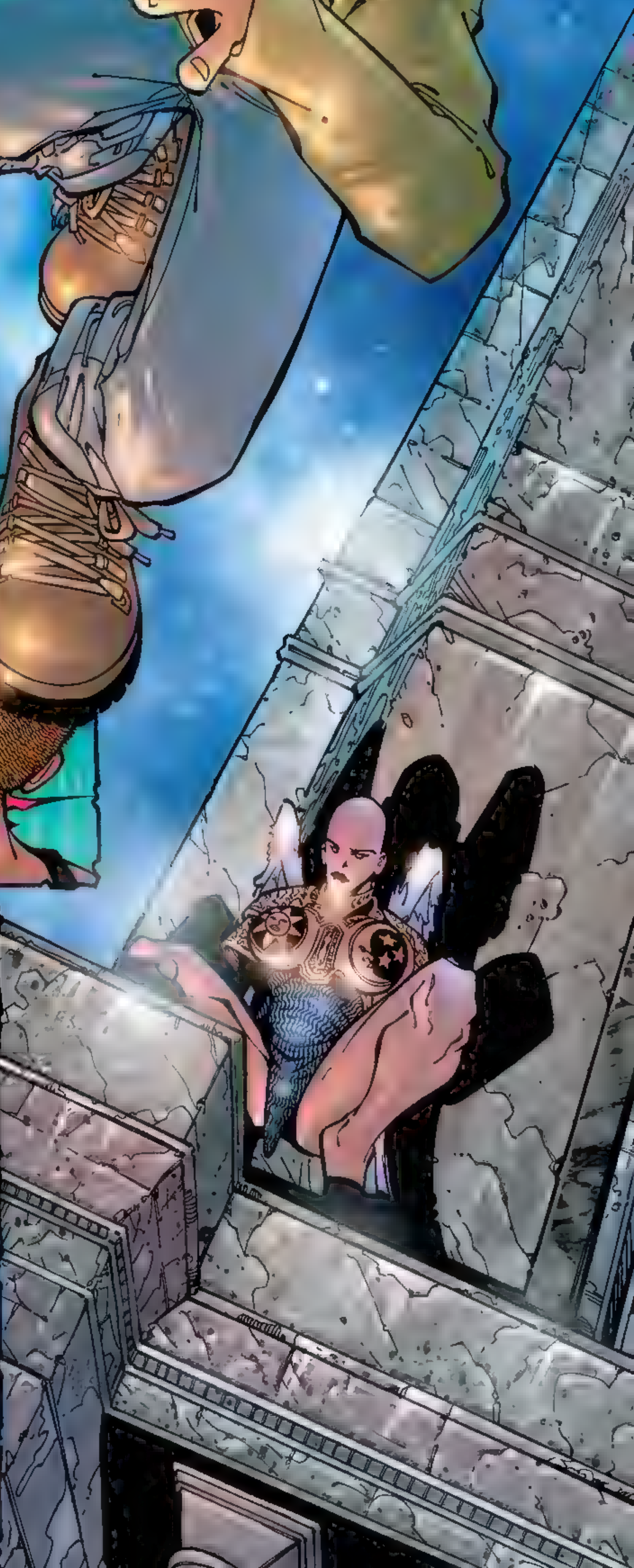


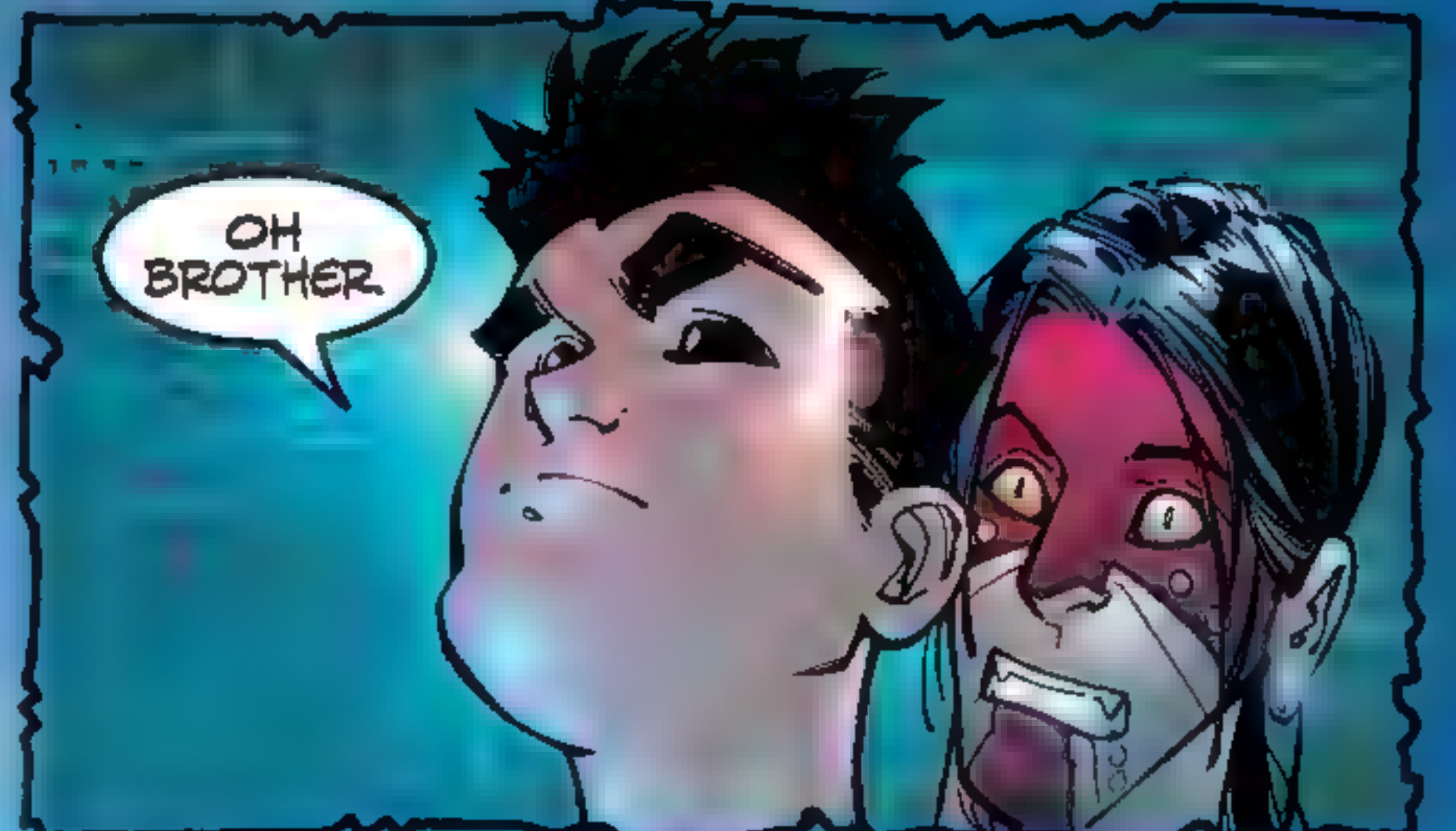
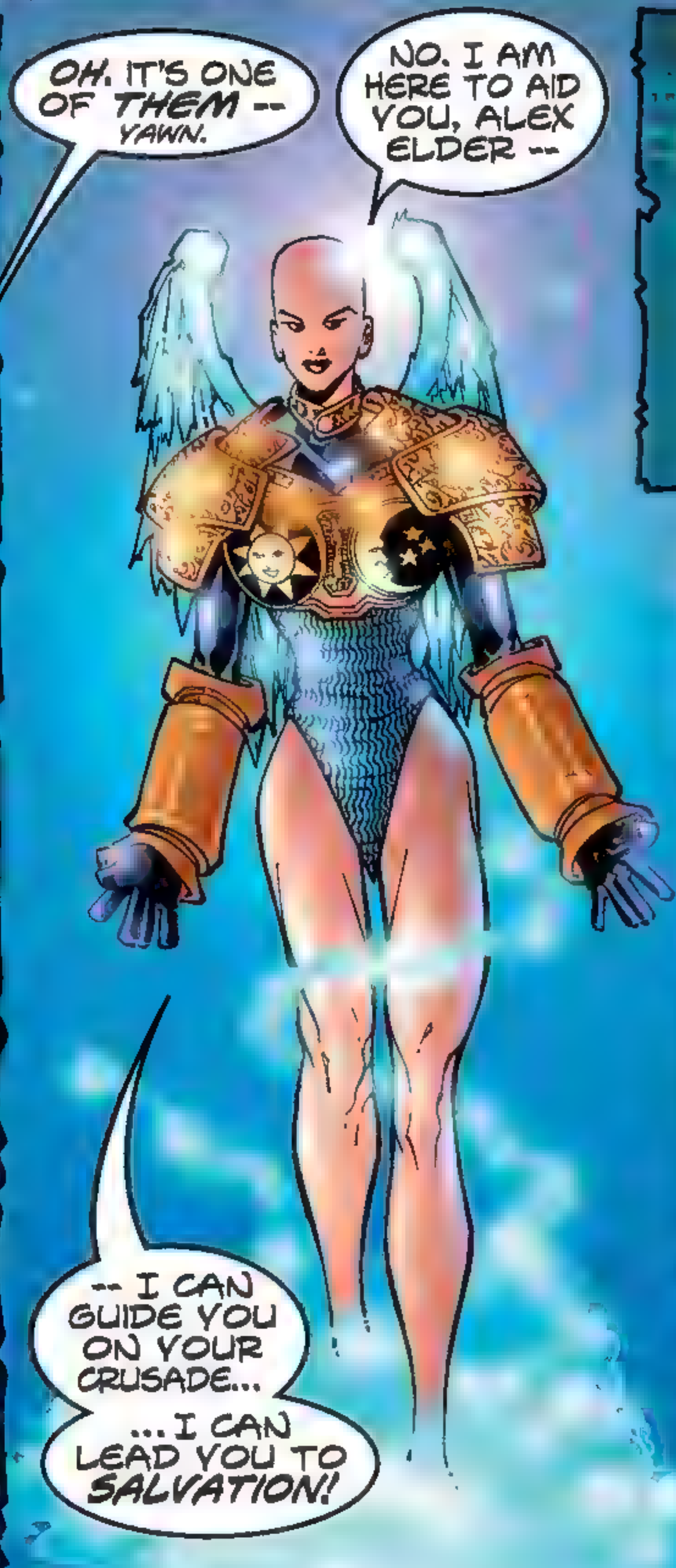
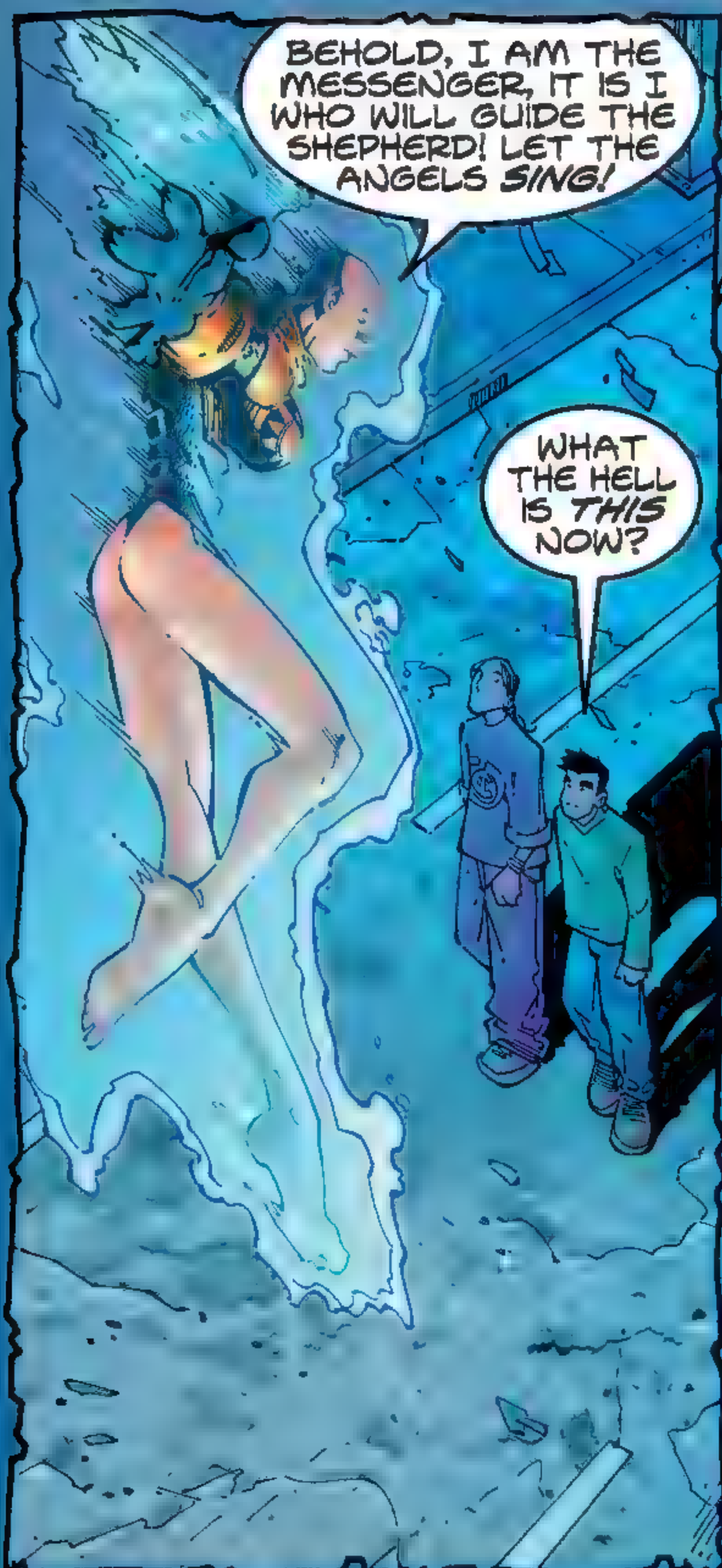
ALIGG!



GET THIS NOW, IDIOT! THE
INQUISITION IS OVER --
YOU GUYS LOST! TELL
YOUR BOSSES THAT I'VE
DECLARED MANHATTAN
A FREE ZONE!

I
SEE YOU
JERKS AGAIN,
I WILL KILL
YOU. NOW
GO --!





DON'T LOOK AT ME, CHICA, YOUR BUSINESS IS WIT' HIM.



ALEX -- I KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU, I CAN HELP YOU!

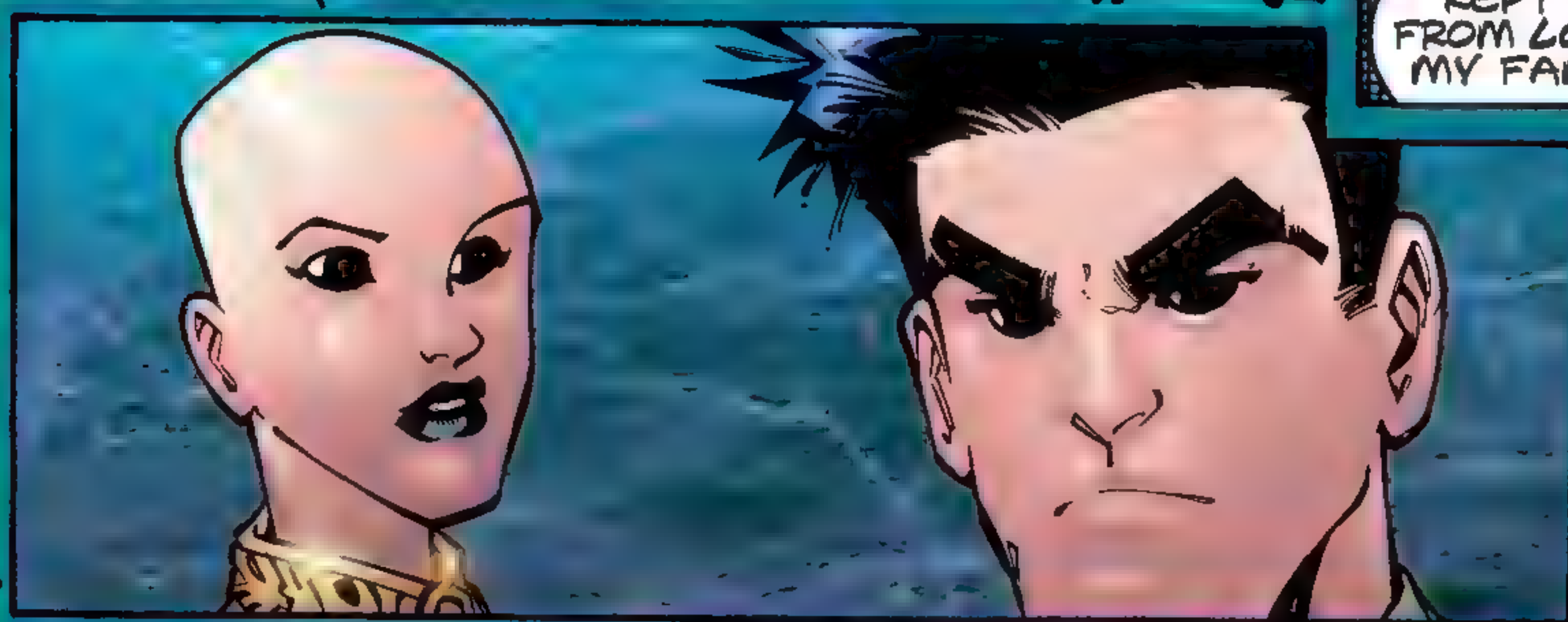
IF ANY OF YOU UP THERE WANTED TO HELP ME, YOU COULD'VE KEPT ME FROM BEING TURNED INTO A VAMPIRE.



WE DON'T GET DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN HUMAN EVENTS THAT MUCH -- THINGS HAPPEN AS THEY DO...

... BUT NOW I UNDERSTAND BETTER! IF YOU HELP ME, WE CAN SAVE OTHER LIVES TOGETHER!

WOULD'VE KEPT ME FROM LOSING MY FAMILY!



WHY'S THIS ALL ABOUT, ANGELINA?

CALL ME ZOPHIE. EVIL HUMANS ARE DESTROYING YOUR KIND -- AND MINE.

WHO?

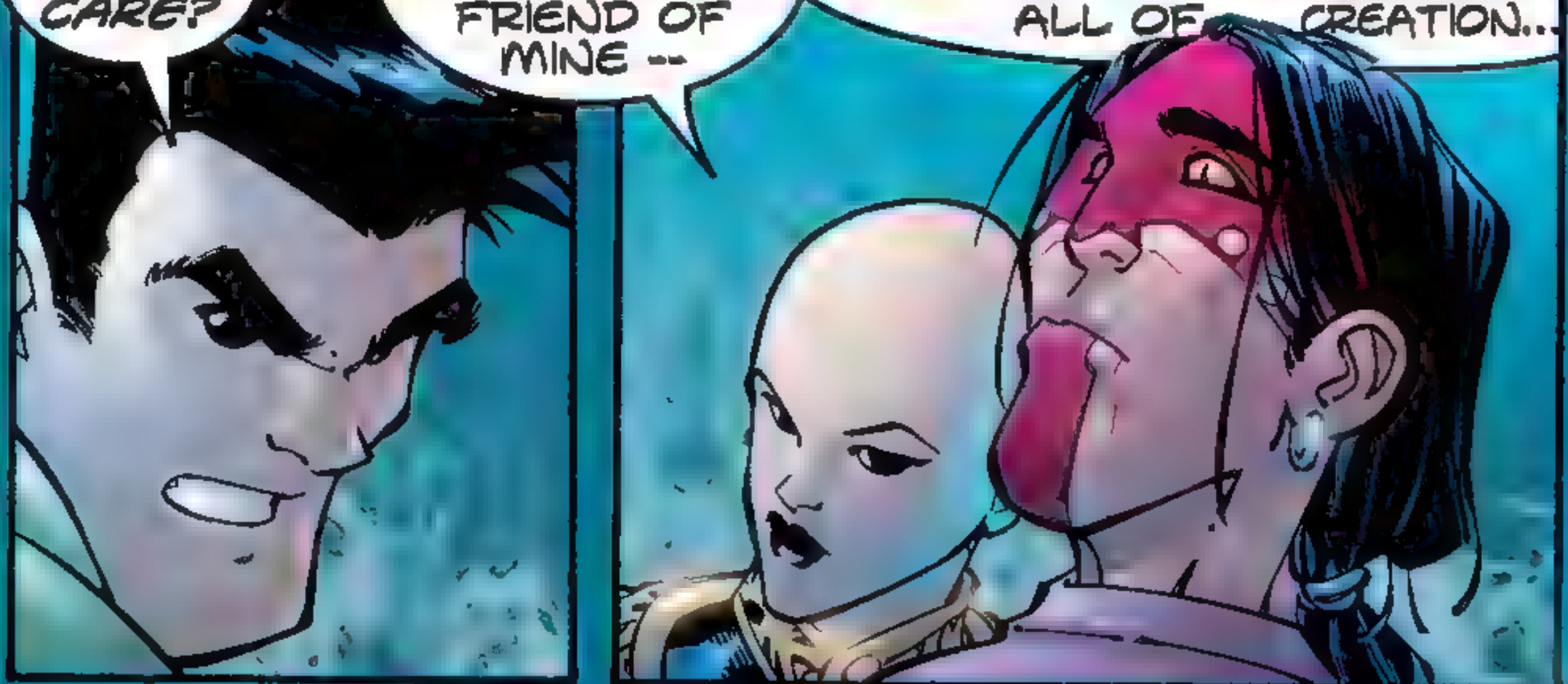
THE DRAGON KNIGHTS, HERE TO CLEAN UP AFTER THE FAILED TEMPLAR CRUSADE -- AND TO START A NEW INQUISITION.



WHY DO YOU CARE?

BECAUSE THEY HAVE TAKEN A FRIEND OF MINE --

-- ANOTHER ANGEL WHO WAS TEACHING US TO EMBRACE ALL OF CREATION...



... AND BECAUSE WE HAVE STAYED TOO FAR APART FROM LIFE -- BECAUSE WE NEED TO BECOME GUARDIANS AGAIN...

... AND BECAUSE WE NEED TO ILLUMINE THE ROAD TO EVIL, SO THAT MORE HUMANS MIGHT SAVE THEMSELVES.



...
OKAY,
TELL
ME.

"I DID BETTER
THAN THAT. I
SHOWED HIM.

"I SHOWED HIM COUNTLESS
PLACES WHERE HIS KIND --
BOTH VAMPIRE AND HUMAN --
HAD DIED VIOLENTLY AT
THE HANDS OF OPPRESSIVE
FORCES LIKE THE
TEMPLARS...

"... FORCES DEDICATED TO
TAKING AWAY THE FREEDOM
OF THE DIFFERENT AND
DISPLACED. FORCES THAT
CLAIMED TO BE SPEAKING
OF GOD, BUT WHO RELIED
INSTEAD ON THEIR OWN
CRUEL JUDGMENTS.

"I SPOKE OF THE
UNIVERSALITY
OF EVIL, AND THE
NEED FOR ALL TO
OPPOSE IT, BECAUSE
THAT IS THE TRUTH --
BUT I DID NOT
FULLY DISCLOSE
MY PERSONAL
INTERESTS...

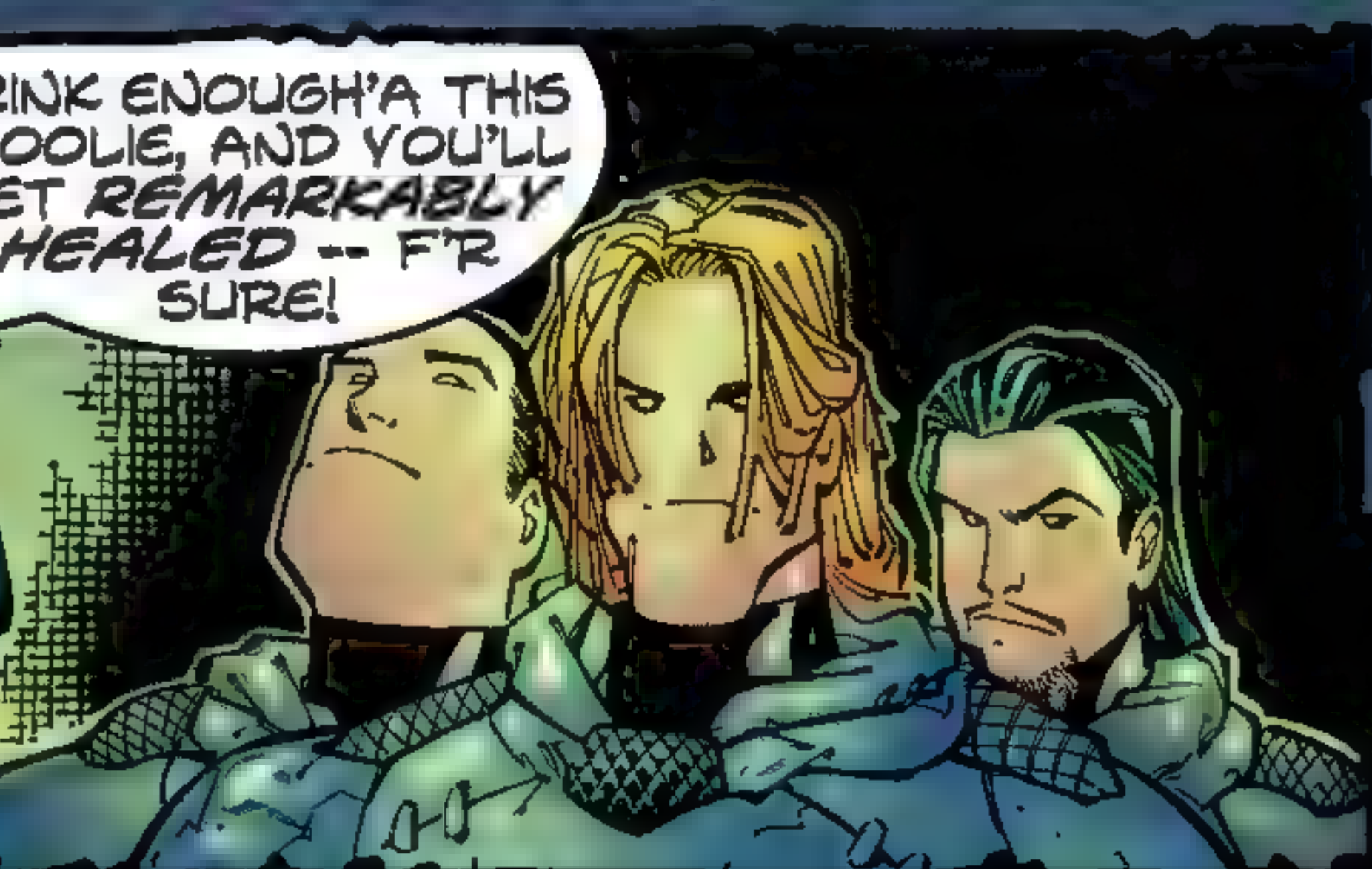
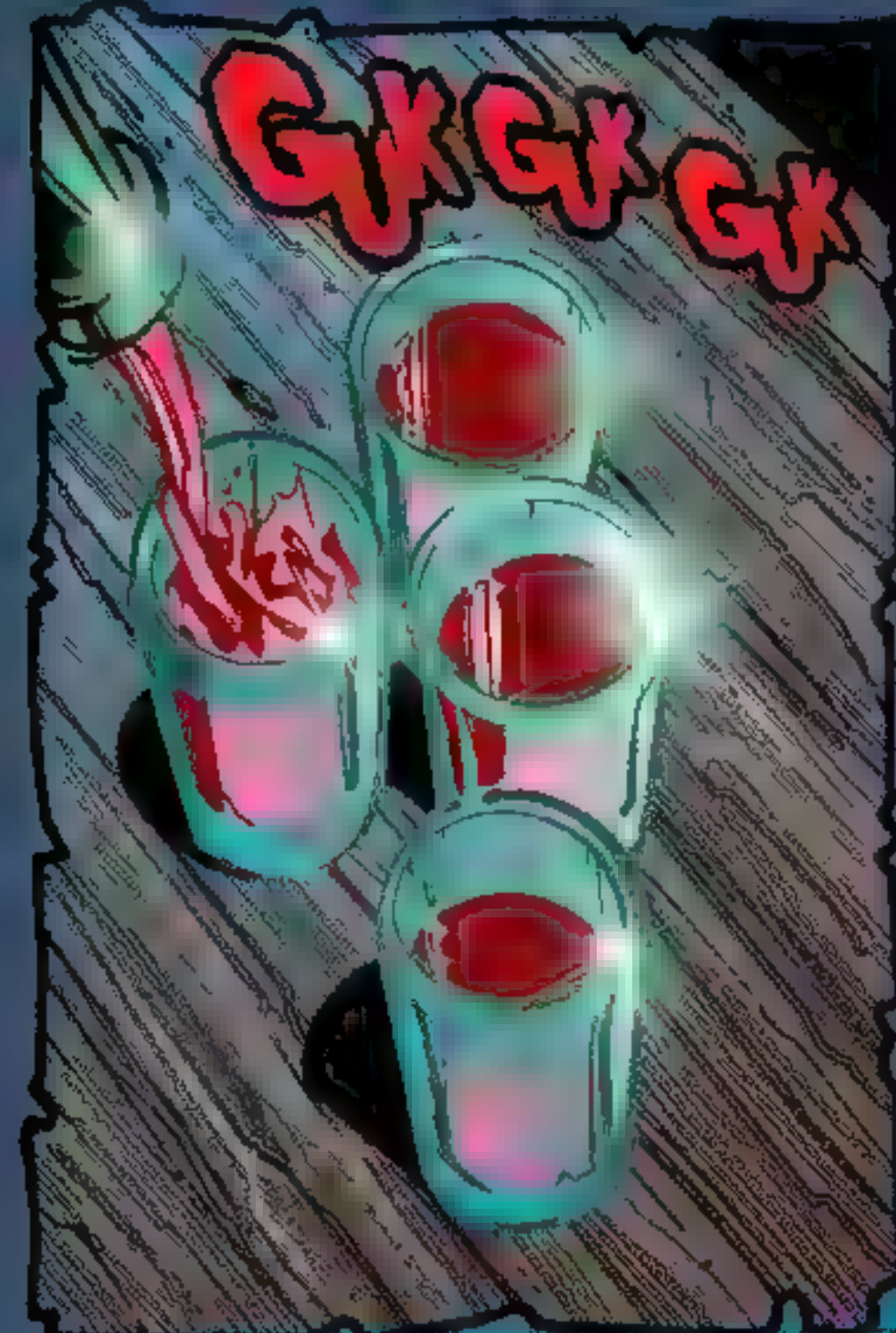
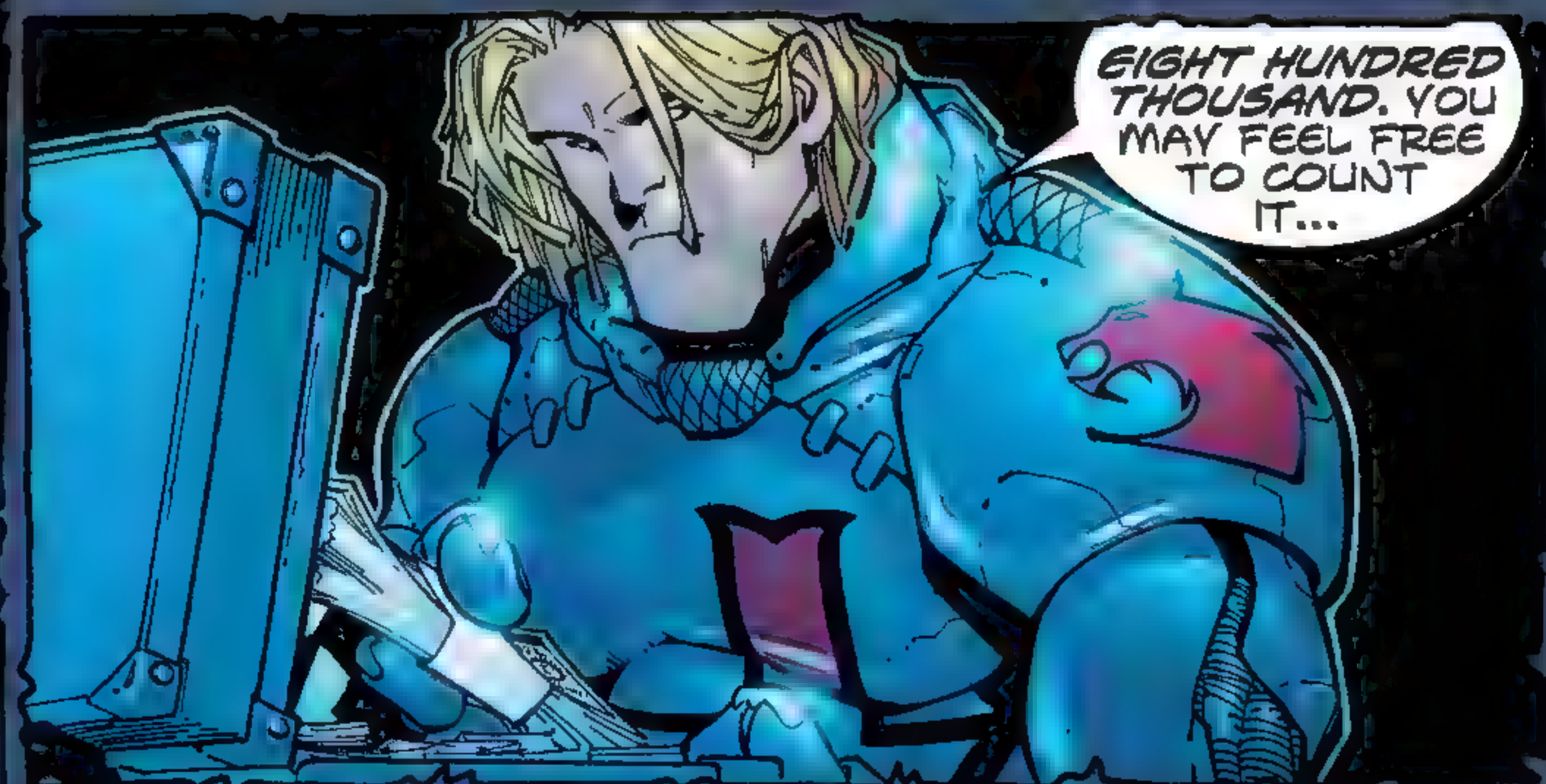
"... NOR DID I
CONFESS THE
GROWING FIRE OF
VENGEANCE IN
MY BREAST.

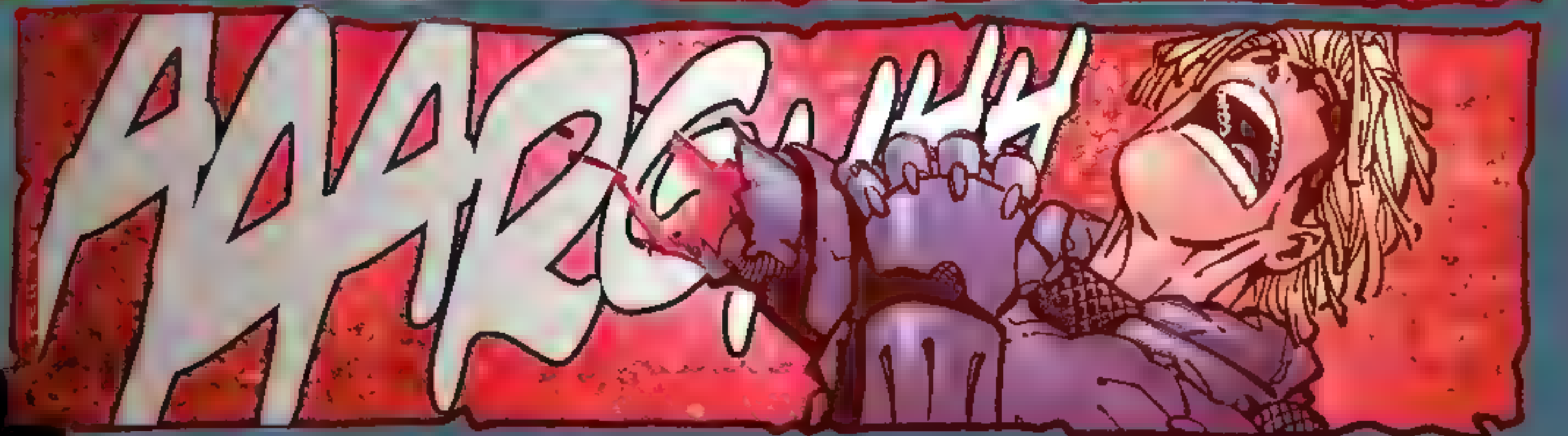
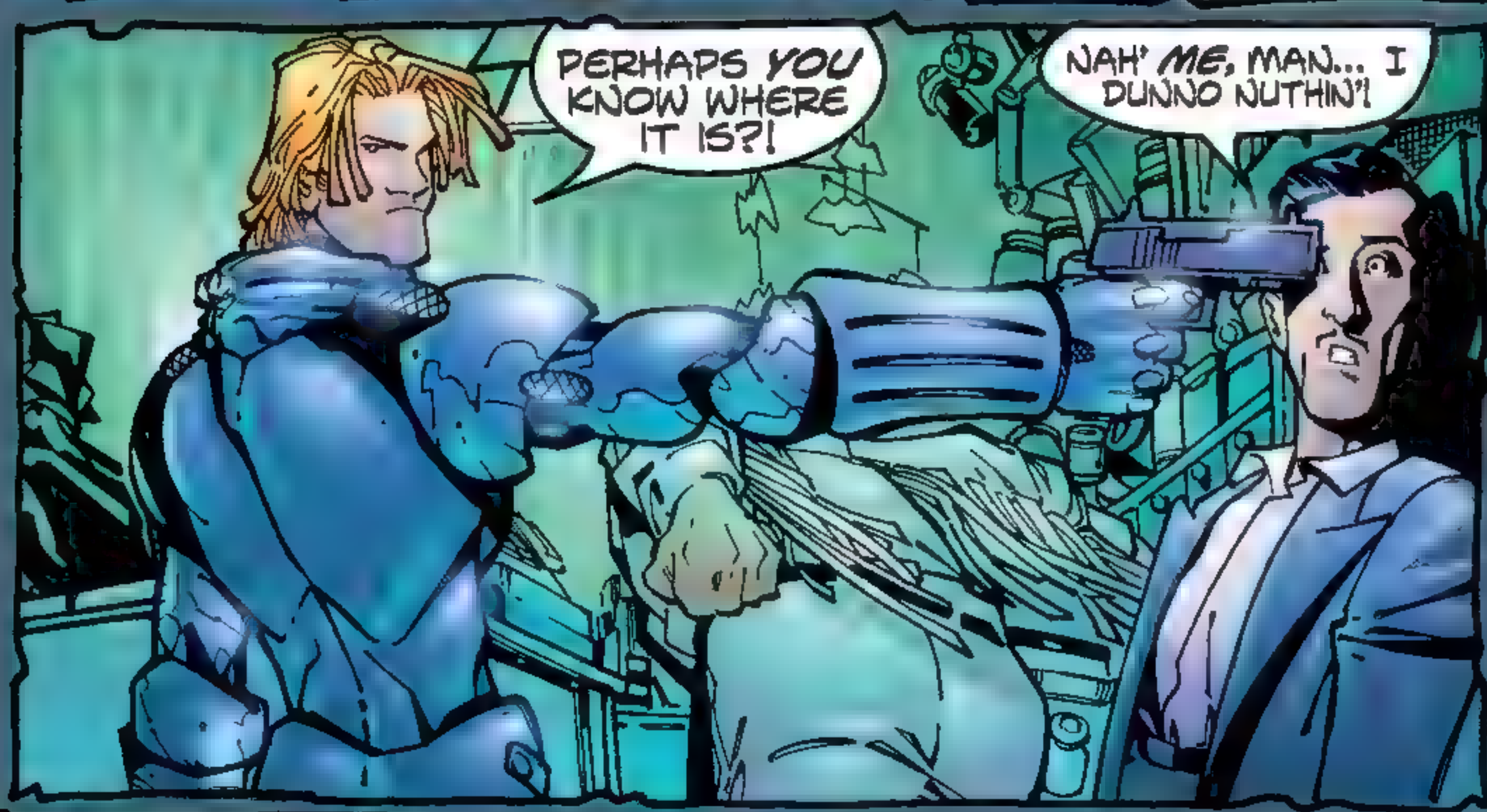
"INSTEAD I BROUGHT
ALEX TO ERIEL'S DEATH
SCENE -- HOPING HIS
RIGHTEOUS ANGER
WOULD MAKE HIM DO
WHAT I THOUGHT I
COULD NOT DO...

"I WANTED
ALEX TO TAKE
THE REVENGE
I COULD NOT
TAKE FOR
MYSELF...

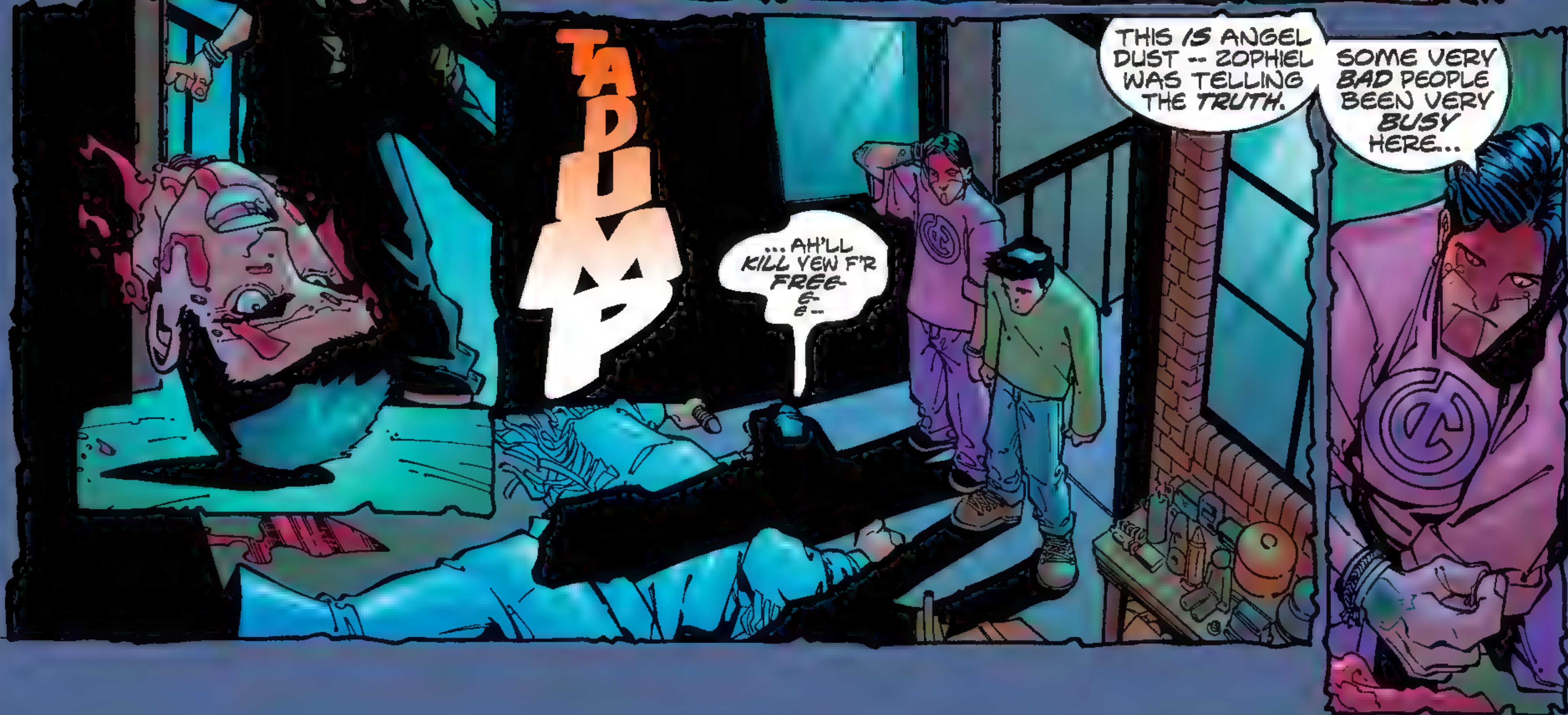
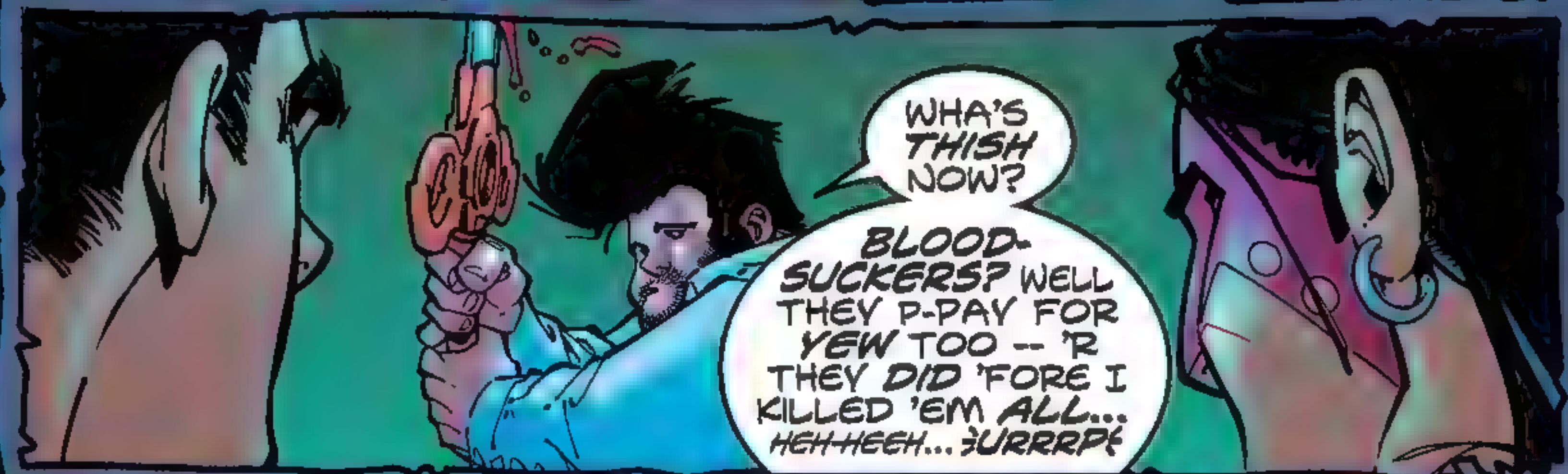
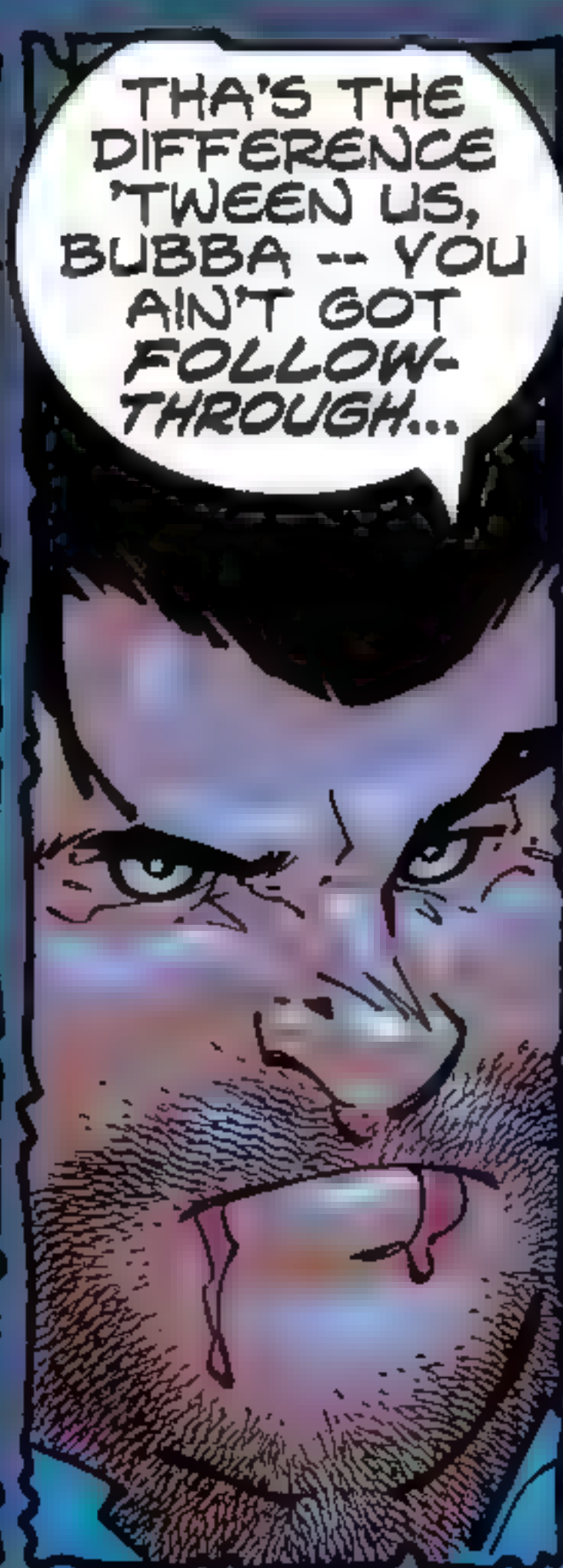
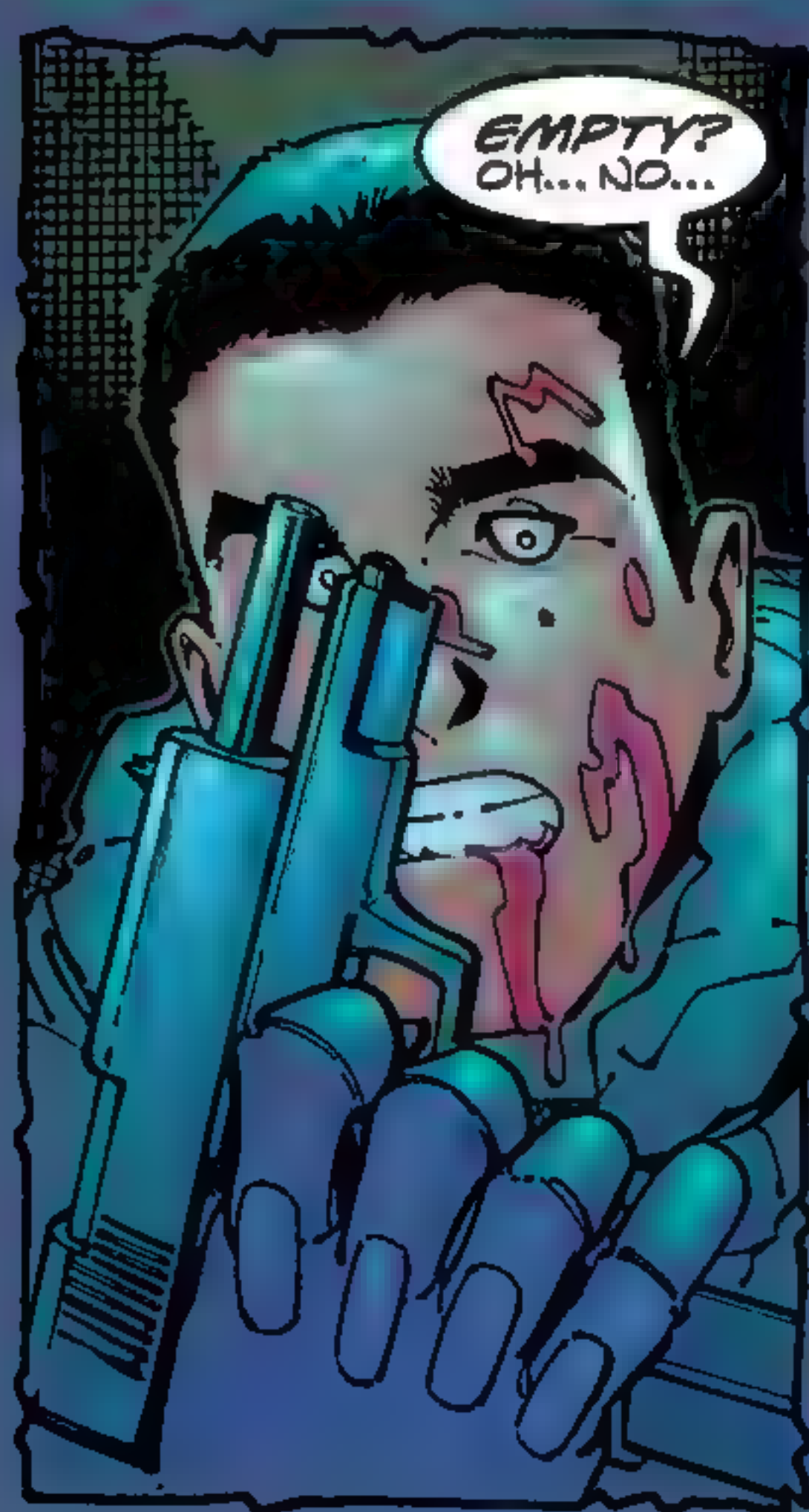
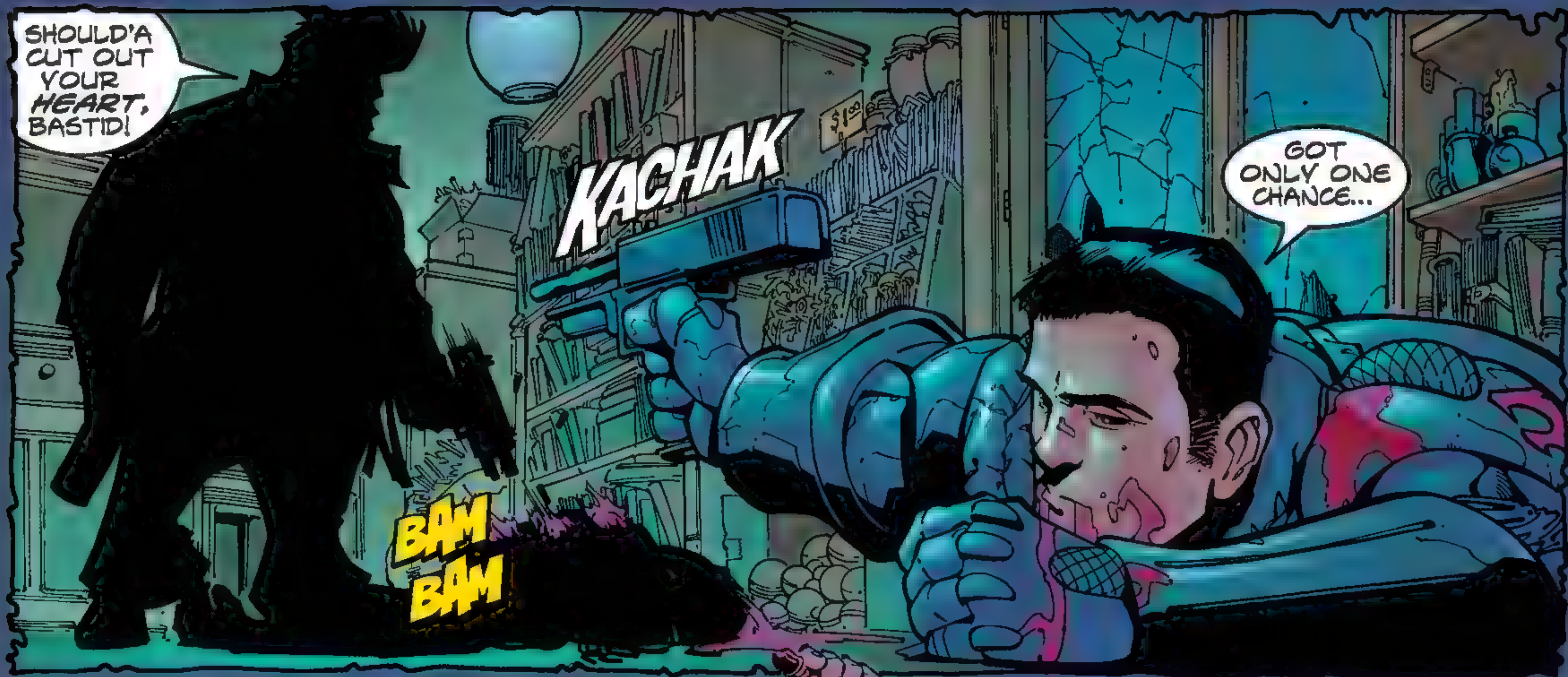
"... I WANTED HIM
TO SLAUGHTER
THEM THE WAY
THEY HAD ERIEL!"

YOUR CRUDE
REFERENCE TO
INTOXICATION
ASIDE, ANGEL
BLOOD HAS
REMARKABLE
HEALING
POWERS...











THIS MUST BE CHINGUERE --

-- REALLY KICK-ASS STUFF! MADE FROM THE **BLOOD** OF ANGELS, YA KNOW...

GOD -- THAT'S REVOLTING!

NOT THE WORLD, **HUMANS** -- AND THE LOWEST KIND AT THAT!

AND TO THINK THAT ERIEL COUNSELED LOVE FOR THIS **BROOD OF VIPERS**! THEY ALL DESERVE TO **DIE** FOR WHAT THEY'VE DONE!

THEY MOSTLY **ARE** ALL DEAD, ANGEL -- BUT I THOUGHT YOUR CAUSE WAS NOBLE...

... ALL THAT TALK ABOUT BECOMING **GUARDIANS** AGAIN -- WAS THIS JUST ABOUT **REVENGE** AFTER ALL?



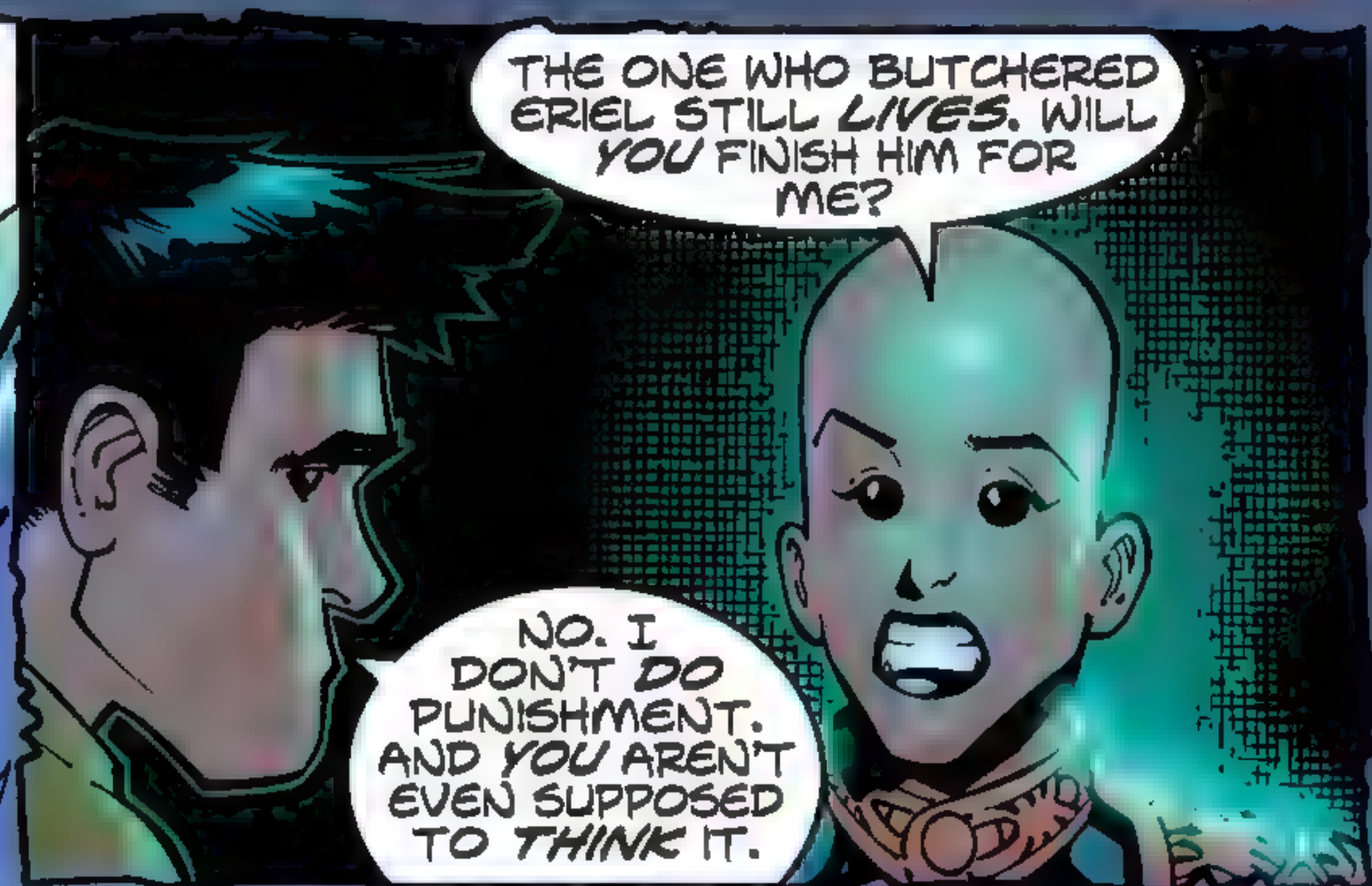
GET RID OF IT!

UGGH, ANGELS RENDERED LIKE LIVESTOCK -- JUST WHEN I THOUGHT I'D SEEN **EVERY HORROR** THIS WORLD CAN PROVIDE!



NO... WHAT I SAID BEFORE I **BELIEVED!**

BUT AFTER WHAT THEY DID TO ERIEL, I CAN'T PRETEND TO **LOVE** THEM -- THEY MUST BE **PUNISHED!**



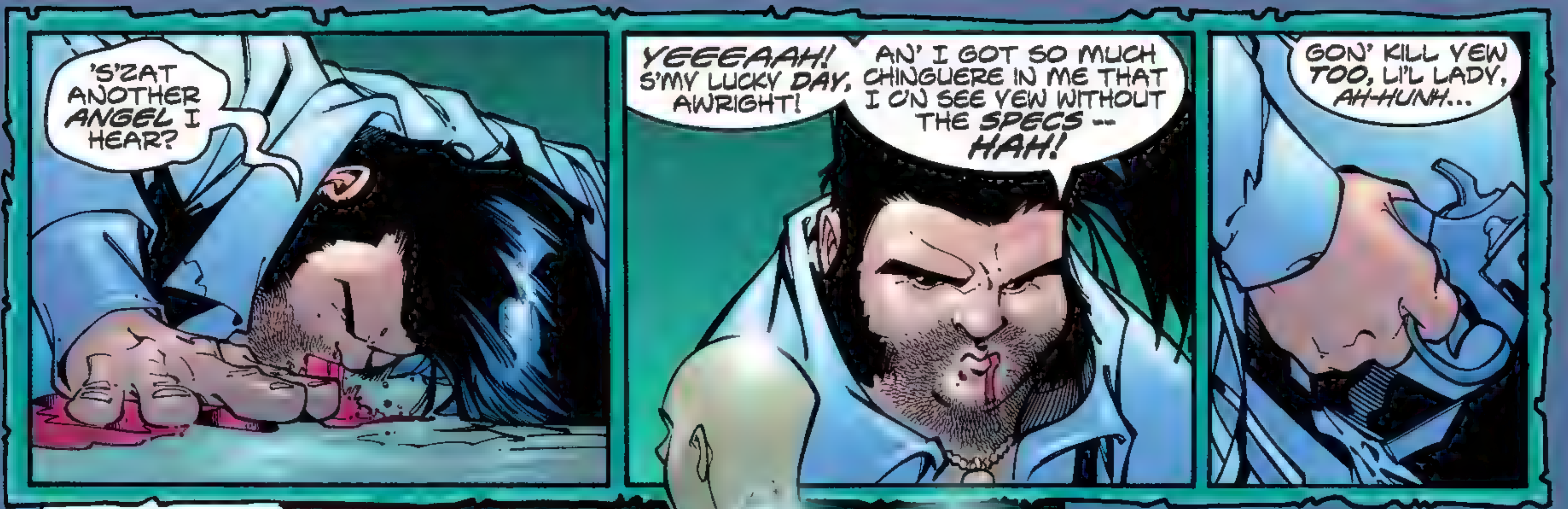
THE ONE WHO BUTCHERED ERIEL STILL **LIVES**. WILL YOU FINISH HIM FOR ME?

NO. I DON'T DO PUNISHMENT. AND YOU AREN'T EVEN SUPPOSED TO **THINK** IT.

YOU'RE RIGHT... OF COURSE. STILL THIS **MONSTER** SLEEPS HAPPILY IN HIS INTOXICATION -- DRUNK ON THE **BLOOD** OF ONE OF GOD'S OWN ANGELS...

IT IS JUST NOT... RIGHT...



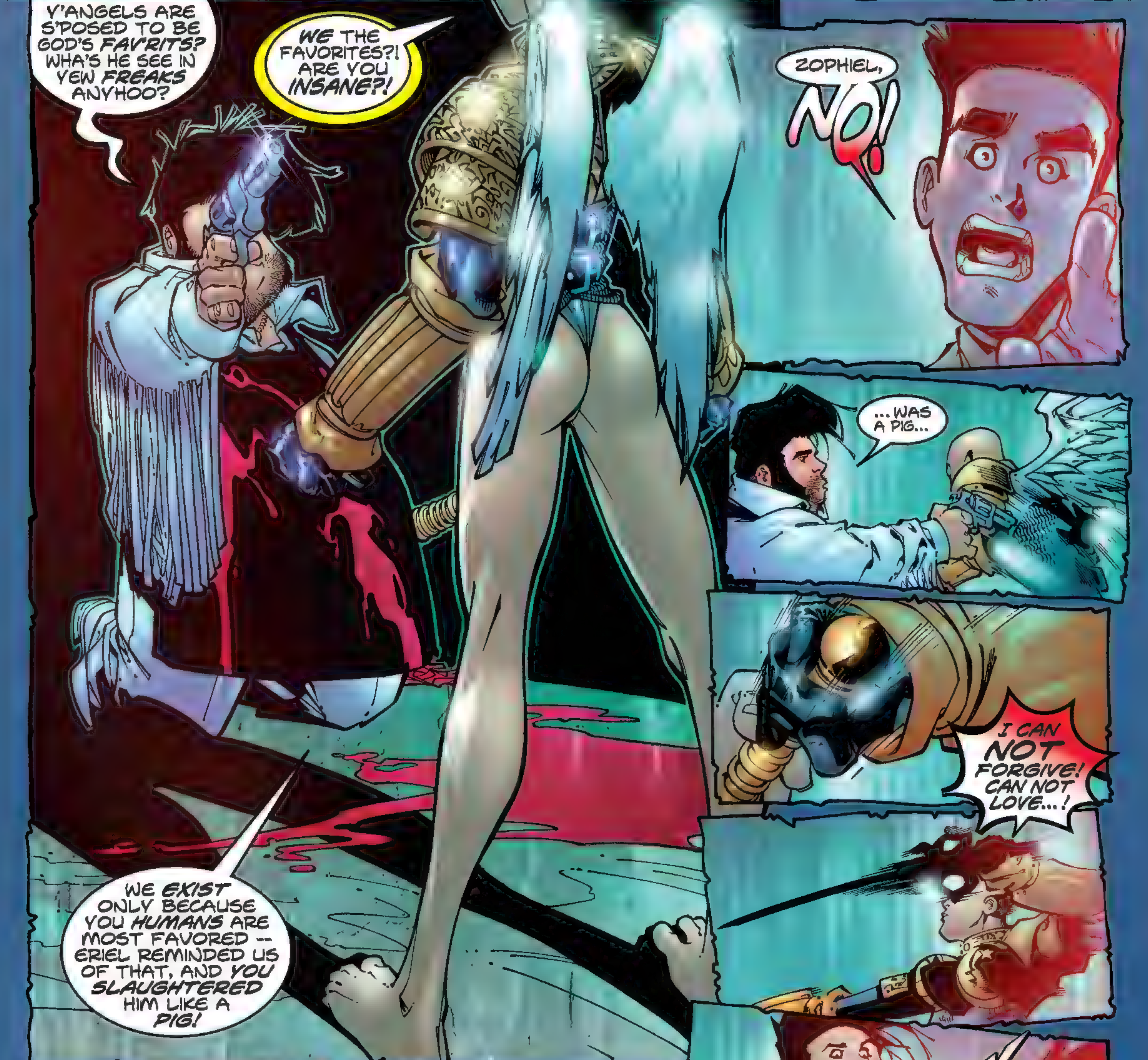


'S'ZAT ANOTHER ANGEL I HEAR?

YEEEAHH! S'MY LUCKY DAY, AWRIGHT!

AN' I GOT SO MUCH CHINGUERE IN ME THAT I CN SEE YEW WITHOUT THE **SPECS** -- **HAH!**

GON' KILL YEW TOO, LI'L LADY, AH-HUNH...



Y'ANGELS ARE S'POSED TO BE GOD'S FAV'RITS? WHA'S HE SEE IN YEW FREAKS ANYHOO?

WE THE FAVORITES?! ARE YOU INSANE?!

ZOPHIEL,

NO!

...WAS A PIG...

I CAN NOT FORGIVE! CAN NOT LOVE...!

WE EXIST ONLY BECAUSE YOU HUMANS ARE MOST FAVORED -- ERIEL REMINDED US OF THAT, AND YOU SLAUGHTERED HIM LIKE A PIG!



HOLY CRAP! AN ANGEL KILLED A HUMAN -- ON PURPOSE!

WHAT HAPPENS NOW...?

SHONK

...IT'S NOT ENOUGH.

I DO NOT KNOW. IT HAS NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE.



ZOPHIEL, YOU HAVE COMMITTED THE ONE UNPARDONABLE **SIN!**

... ZOPHIEL CANNOT TAKE A HUMAN LIFE WITHOUT COMMISSION FROM ON **HIGH!**

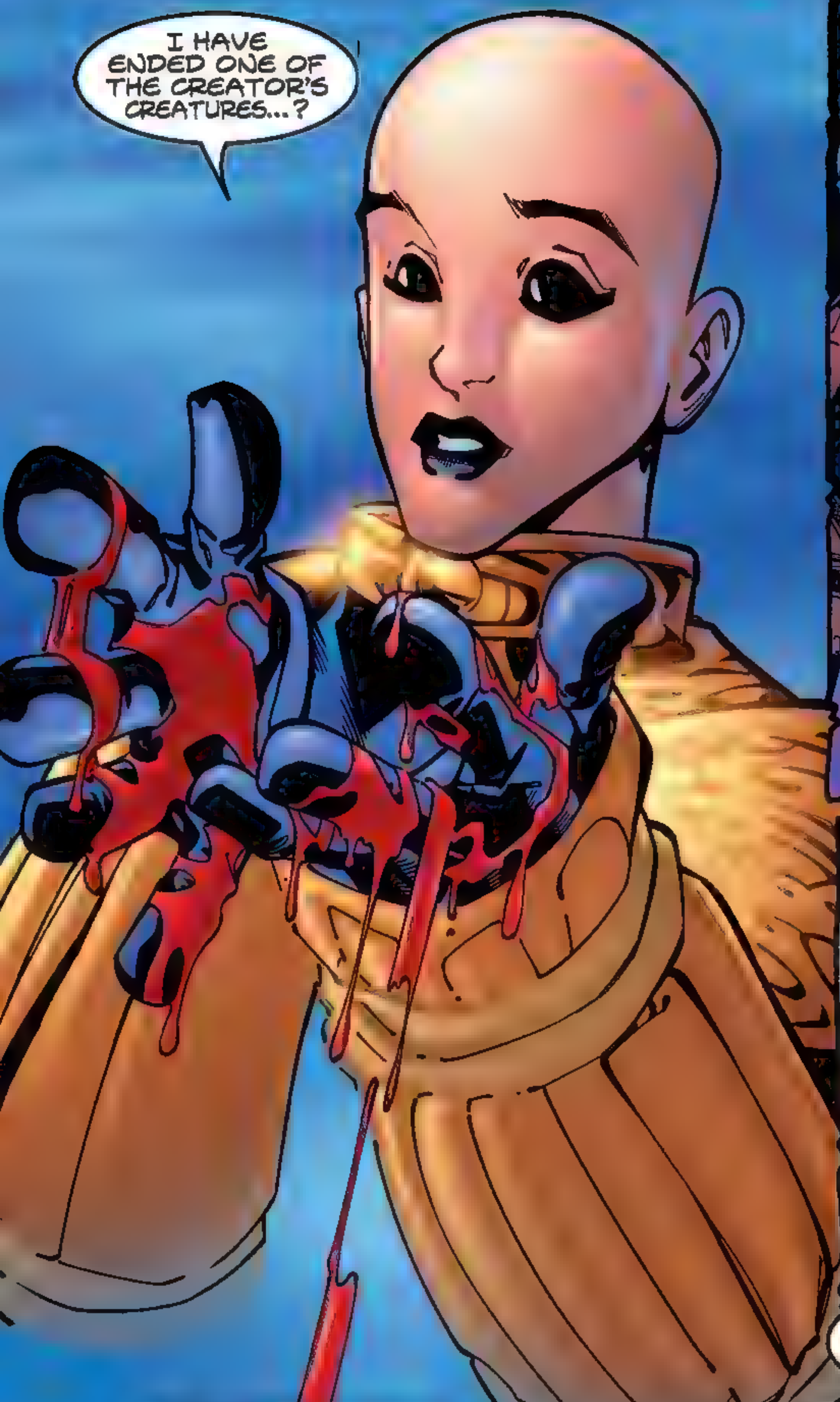
YOU WERE SPECIFICALLY INSTRUCTED TO TURN YOUR BACK ON THESE ANGEL-HUNTERS -- THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN DEALT WITH IN DUE TIME.

WE ALL FEEL HIS LOSS ACUTELY, RAPHAEL. STILL...

GO EASY, MICHAEL, SHE ACTED IN **SELF-DEFENSE** -- AND IN EXTREME **GRIEF** OVER ERIEL!



YOU HAVE NOT ONLY DISOBEYED, ZOPHIEL, YOU HAVE PLAYED **HOB** WITH THE MORTALITY **SCHEDULE!**



I HAVE ENDED ONE OF THE CREATOR'S CREATURES...?

SHE'S... GONE? TO BIG TROUBLE! I RECOGNIZED ARCHANGEL MICHAEL'S VOICE...

... AFTER MY RUN-IN WITH THAT HARD-CASE,* I DON'T ENVY ZOPHIEL AT ALL.

*SEE CRIMSON #7 - Scott

ZOPHEL, YOU ARE **BANISHED** TO EARTH FOR AN UNSPECIFIED TERM -- TO LIVE AMONGST THE HUMANS AND LEARN THE MASSIVE IMPORT OF YOUR ACTIONS!

THAT'S TOO HARSH! WHILE SHE'S EARTH-BOUND, SHE'LL BE ALMOST HUMAN HERSELF!

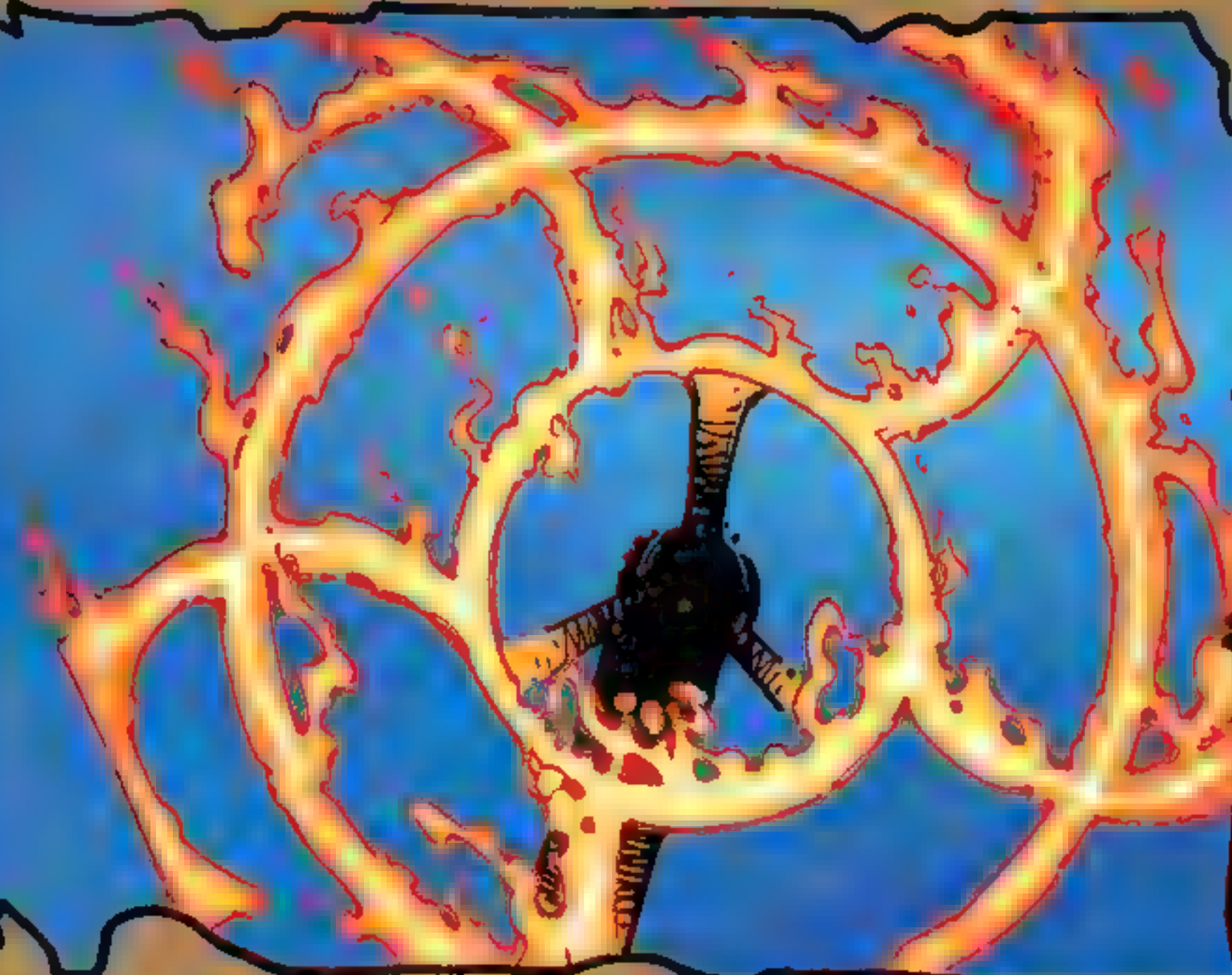
SHE COULD DIE DOWN THERE!

THEN IF SHE'S GOOD, SHE'LL COME BACK TO US, WON'T SHE?

STILL NOT GETTING THE WHOLE SALVATION THING, ARE YOU, MIKE?

ENOUGH! RULES ARE RULES!

REMUEL -- MARK HER!



IT DOESN'T LOOK THAT BAD -- KINDA **EXOTIC**, ACTUALLY -- AND THEY'VE GOT MAKE-UPS DOWN HERE THAT'LL COVER IT...

NO. IT IS THE SIGN OF MY CRIME -- MY **SENTENCE** -- I WILL WEAR IT WITH **PRIDE**.

WITH YOUR CREDENTIALS, MY BOSS'D TAKE YOU IN IN A SECOND...

NO, I'VE **SINNED**. I MUST **REDEEM** MYSELF, NOT SINK FURTHER INTO **FILTH**. I BELONG TO NEITHER SIDE FOR NOW.

WE'RE ALL MADE IN THE CREATOR'S IMAGE, AND I MUST LEARN TO SEE THAT AGAIN.

GOOD-BYE, AZ -- I THINK I WILL GO LOOK IN ON YOUNG MR. ELDER...

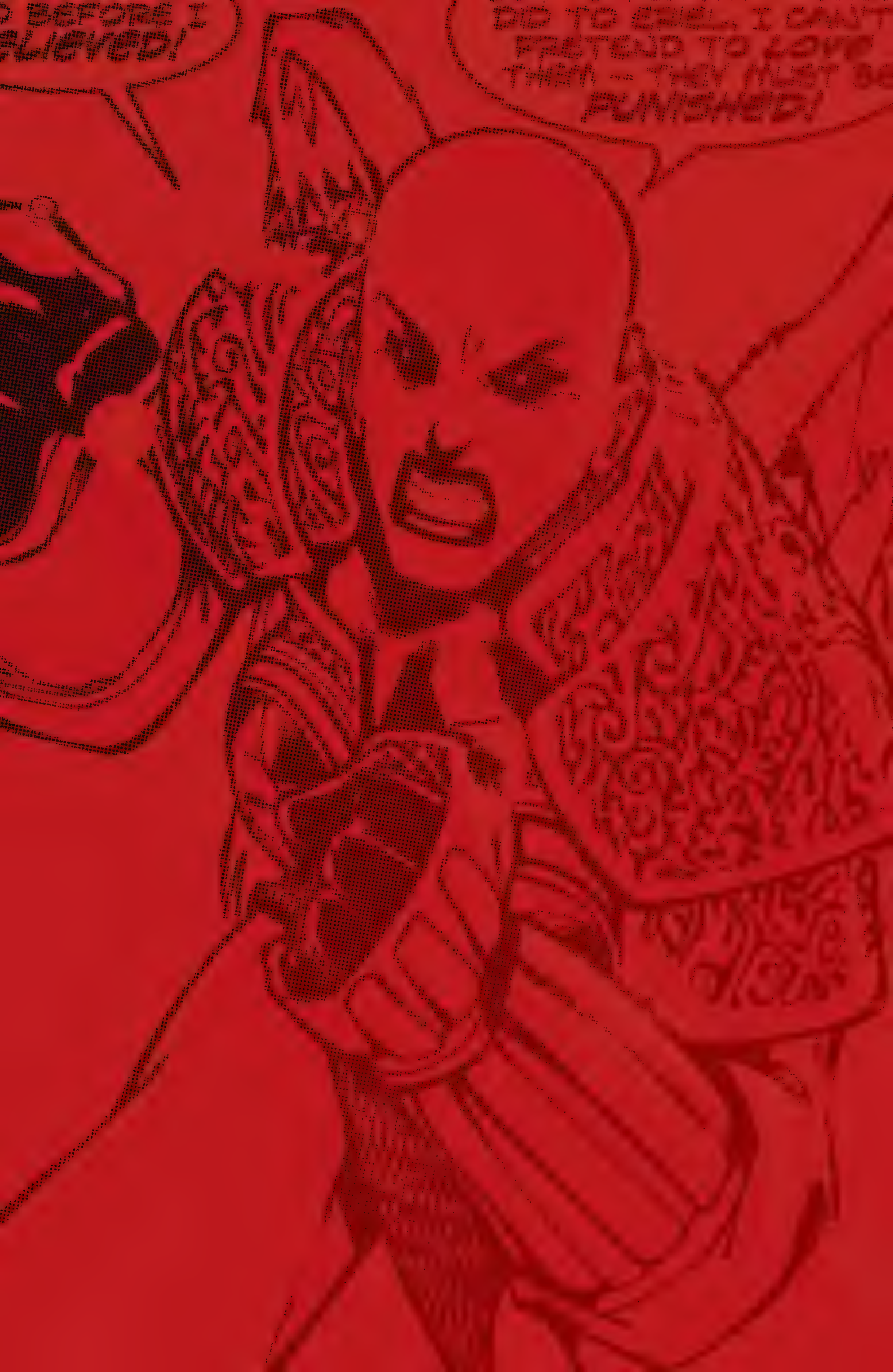
ADIOS, ZOPH -- REMEMBER OUR **PACT**...

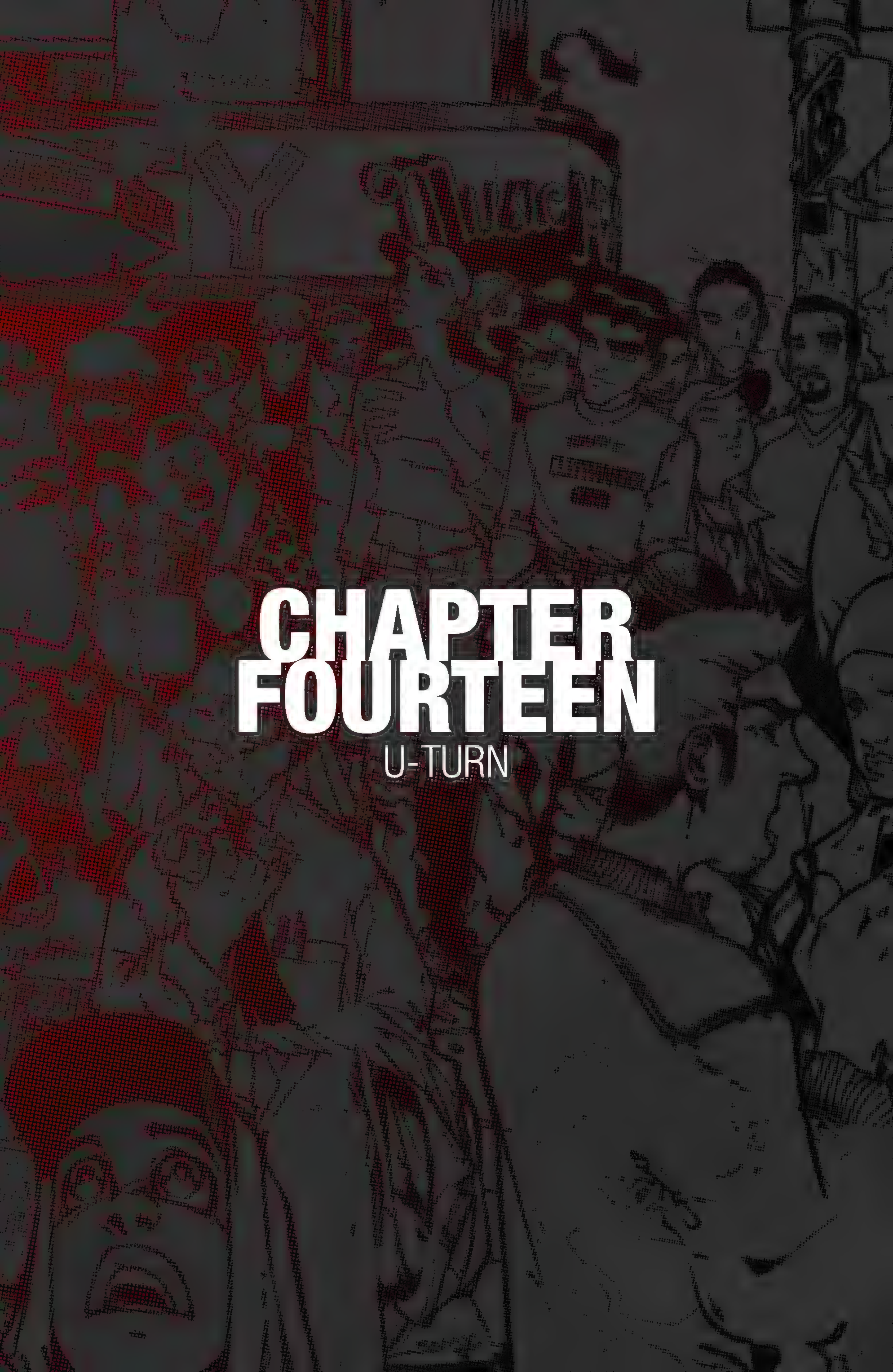
...WHEN **ETERNITY** COLLAPSES, WE'LL **MEET**...

YES, I REMEMBER -- AND I **LOVE** YOU TOO...

...I
...I

DID TO ERIEL I CAN'T
PRETEND TO LOVE
THEM - THEY MUST BE
PUNISHED!





CHAPTER FOURTEEN

U-TURN



NOT TOO LONG AGO, NEW YORK CITY WAS GROUND ZERO IN THE WAR BETWEEN THE TEMPLAR KNIGHTS AND THE CREATURES OF DARKNESS.

IT ENDED IN A DRAW AS THESE CONFLICTS OFTEN DO, BUT THE CITY STILL CARRIES THE SCARS -- IF YOU KNOW WHERE TO LOOK.

SOMETIMES, THE SCARS ARE ALL ALEX ELDER CAN SEE. A VAMPIRE WHO STILL CLINGS VIGOROUSLY TO HIS HUMANITY, ALEX STOOD IN THE BREACH BETWEEN THE COMBATANTS AND HELPED FORCE THE STALEMATE THAT SPARED THE CITY.

NOW, AS MUCH AS IS POSSIBLE, NEW YORK HAS RETURNED TO NORMAL.

BUT "NORMAL" FOR NEW YORK IS STILL PRECARIOUS AND OFTEN DEADLY -- AND DESPITE ALEX'S VIGILANCE, PEOPLE WILL SUFFER AND DIE THIS NIGHT. ALEX DOESN'T CONCEDE THAT REALITY, HOWEVER...

RETURN



HEY, EMMA?!
WHY'N'T YOU OPEN THE SHELTER AWREADY? ME AN' BOOKER ARE HUNGRY, F'R CRY-EYE!

WE WILL OPEN **PRECISELY** AT SEVEN, ROGER -- AS ALWAYS.

ANOTHER DAY BITES THE DUST, EH?

YEP -- AND I'M STILL **ALIVE**...
... DAMNIT!

YEAH, U'MON **ALREADY!** THEY THINK WE'RE HAVIN' A **GOOD TIME** DOWN HERE?! THEY THINK WE WANT TO LIVE **FOREVER?**

EMM --?
SEVEN O'CLOCK.
BUT --
SEVEN O'CLOCK.

I WANT TO **MOVE ON**, I WANT **RELIEF** FROM THIS MISERABLE LIFE...

TELL ME ABOUT IT. WE **DESERVE** OUR **FINAL REWARD**...

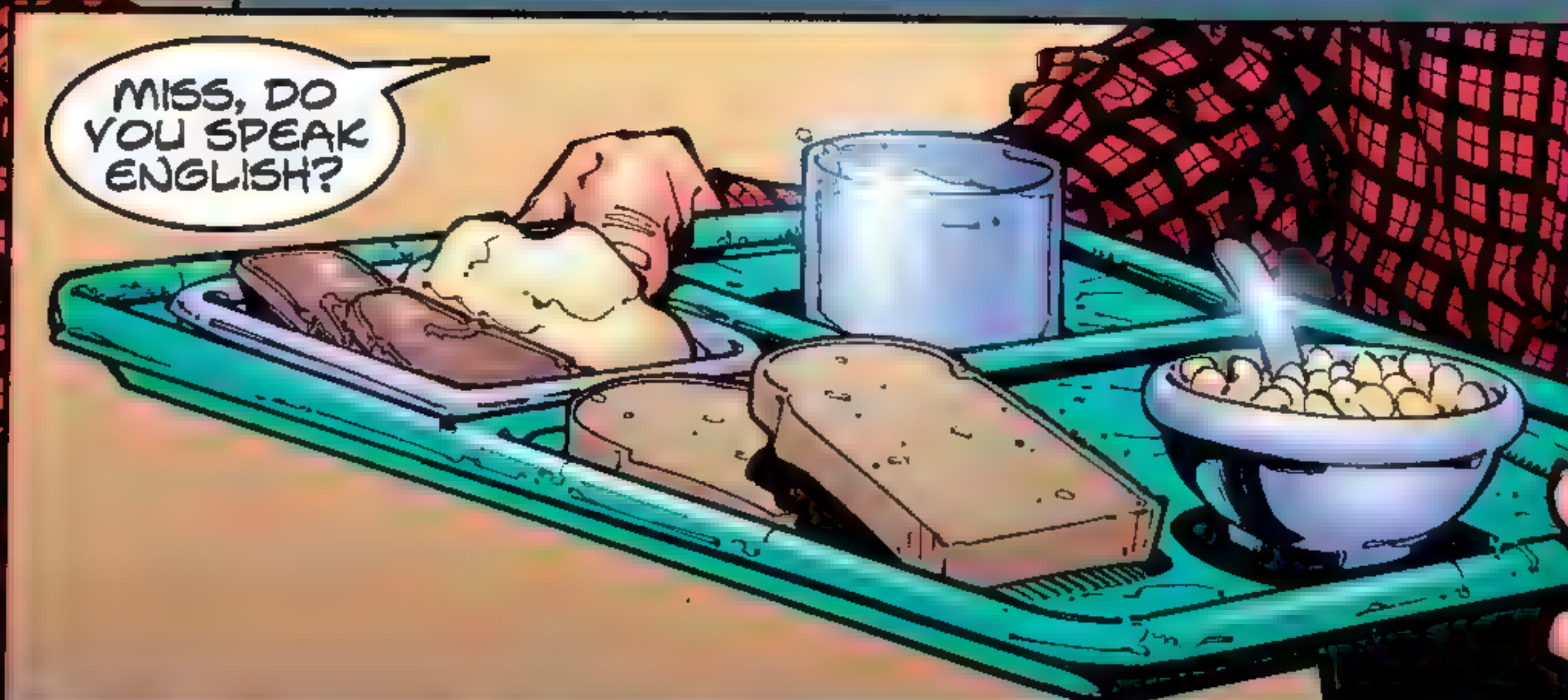
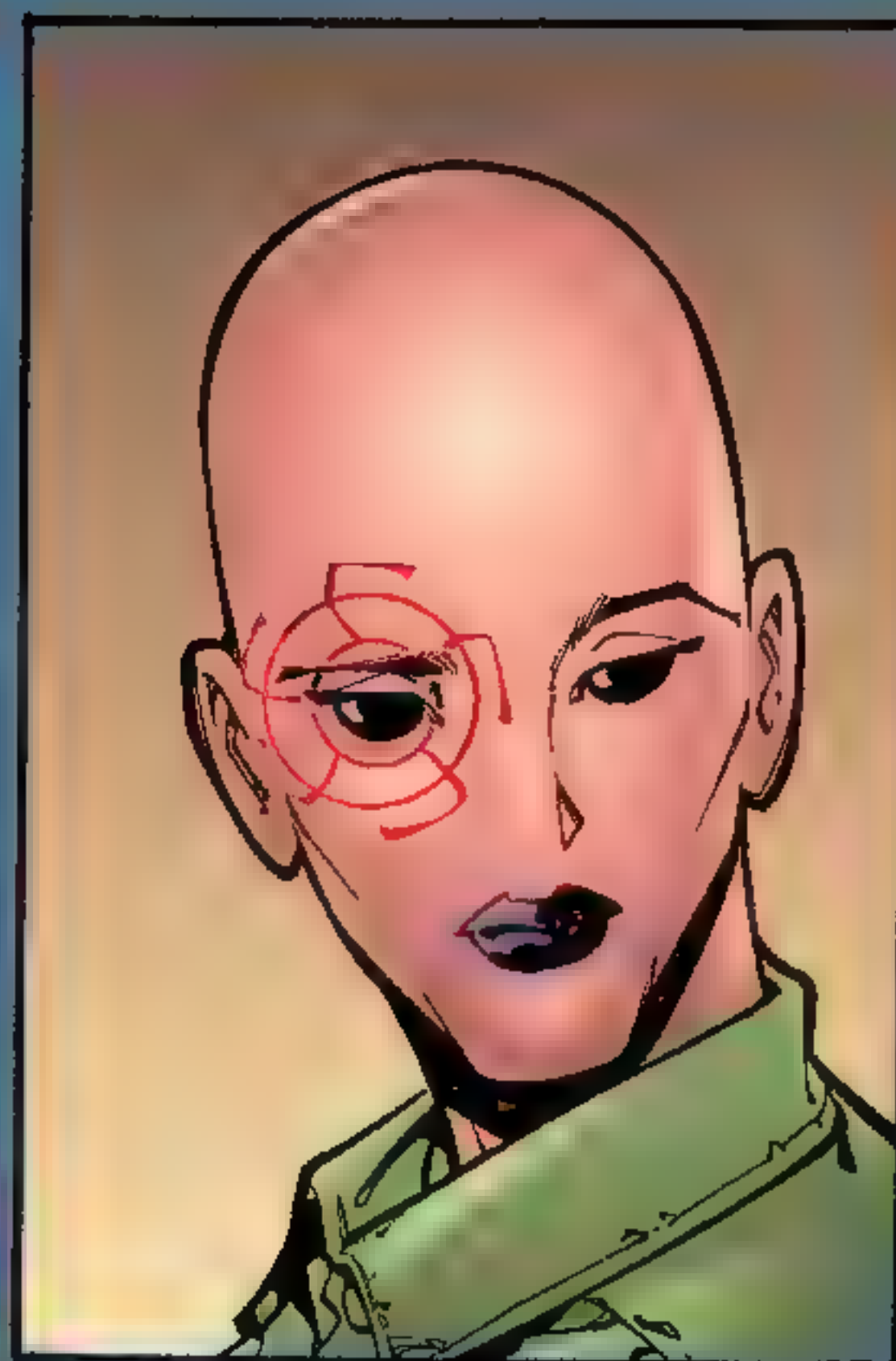
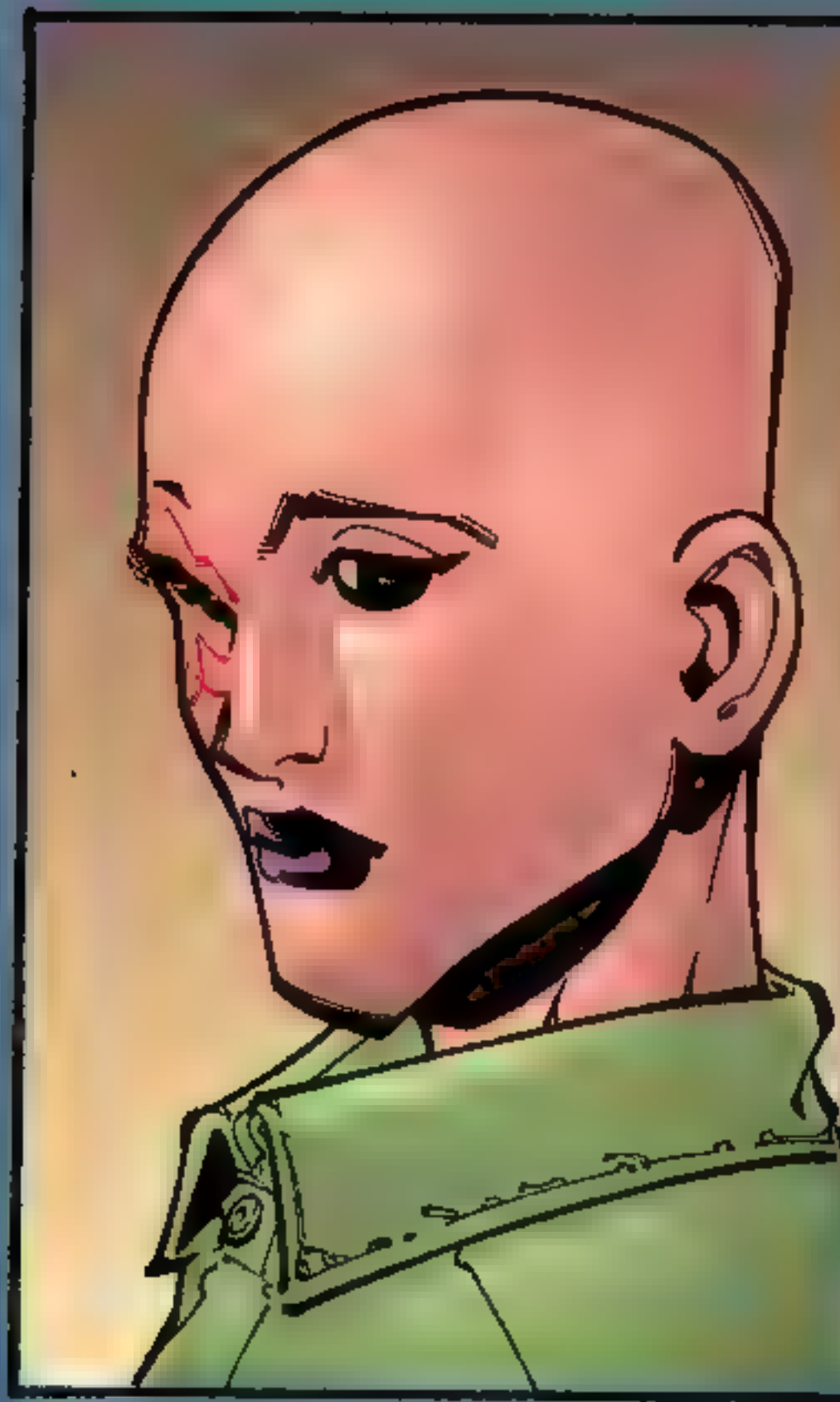
... WE **DESERVE** TO GO TO **HEAVEN!**

U'MON, BOOK -- OUR **PARADISE** OPENS AT LAST! **NOURISHMENT** AWAITS!

REALLY CRAPPY **NOURISHMENT.**

AH, YES... BUT IT'S **FREE.**

YEAH, I WANNA SEE THE **ANGELS!**



SHE DOESN'T REMEMBER IF SHE SPEAKS ANY LANGUAGE -- OR IF SHE'S EVER EATEN A MEAL. NOT LONG BEFORE, ZOPHIEL HAD BEEN ONE OF HEAVEN'S ELITE -- AN ANGEL...

...NOW BECAUSE SHE KILLED A MONSTROUS EARTHLING, SHE HAS BEEN STRIPPED OF HER RANK AND BANISHED TO A LIFE OF HUMAN MORTALITY...

...AND THE DEVASTATION OF HER LOSS HAS TOTALLY DISORIENTED HER.

-- D'YOU THINK SHE'S A REFUGEE FROM KOSOVO, OR SOMETHING?

OR MAYBE IT'S FROM HER FAVORITE ROCK BAND, WHO KNOWS?

NNUUHH...
UUUUH!

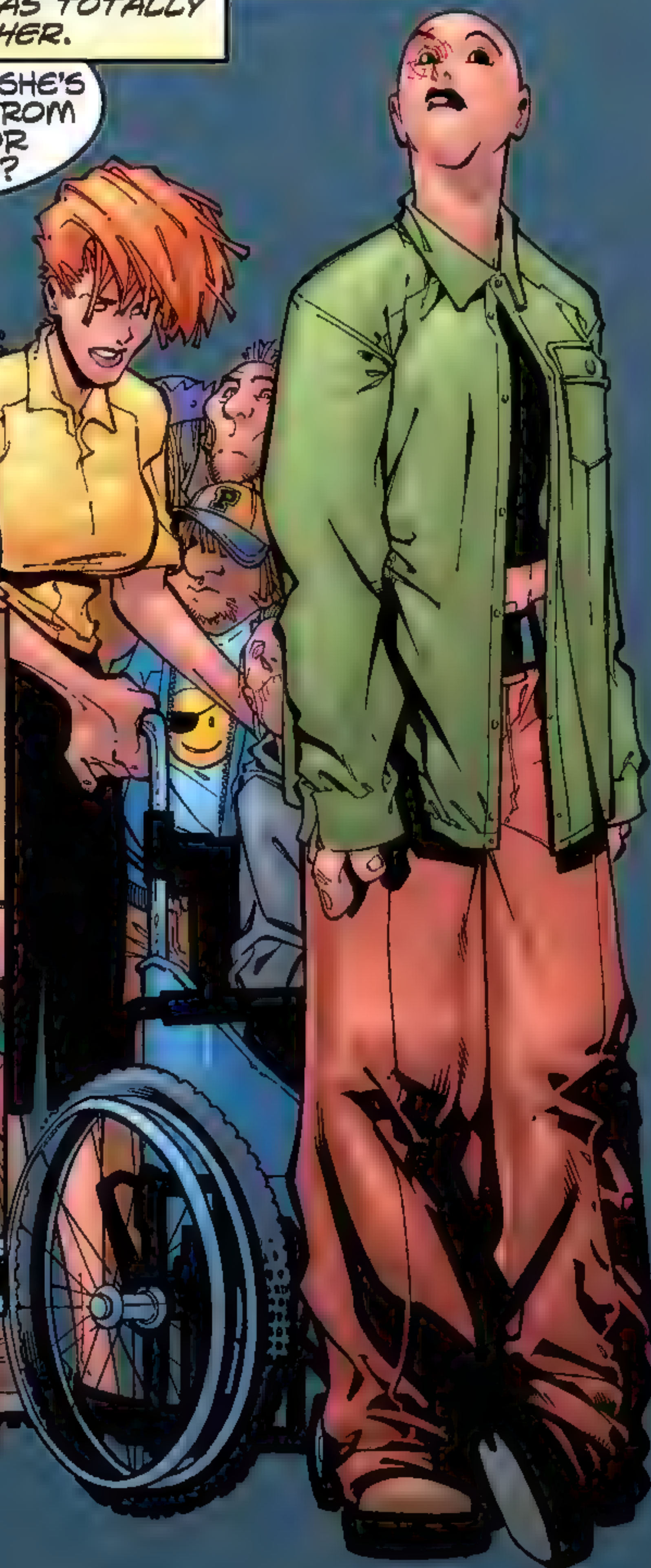
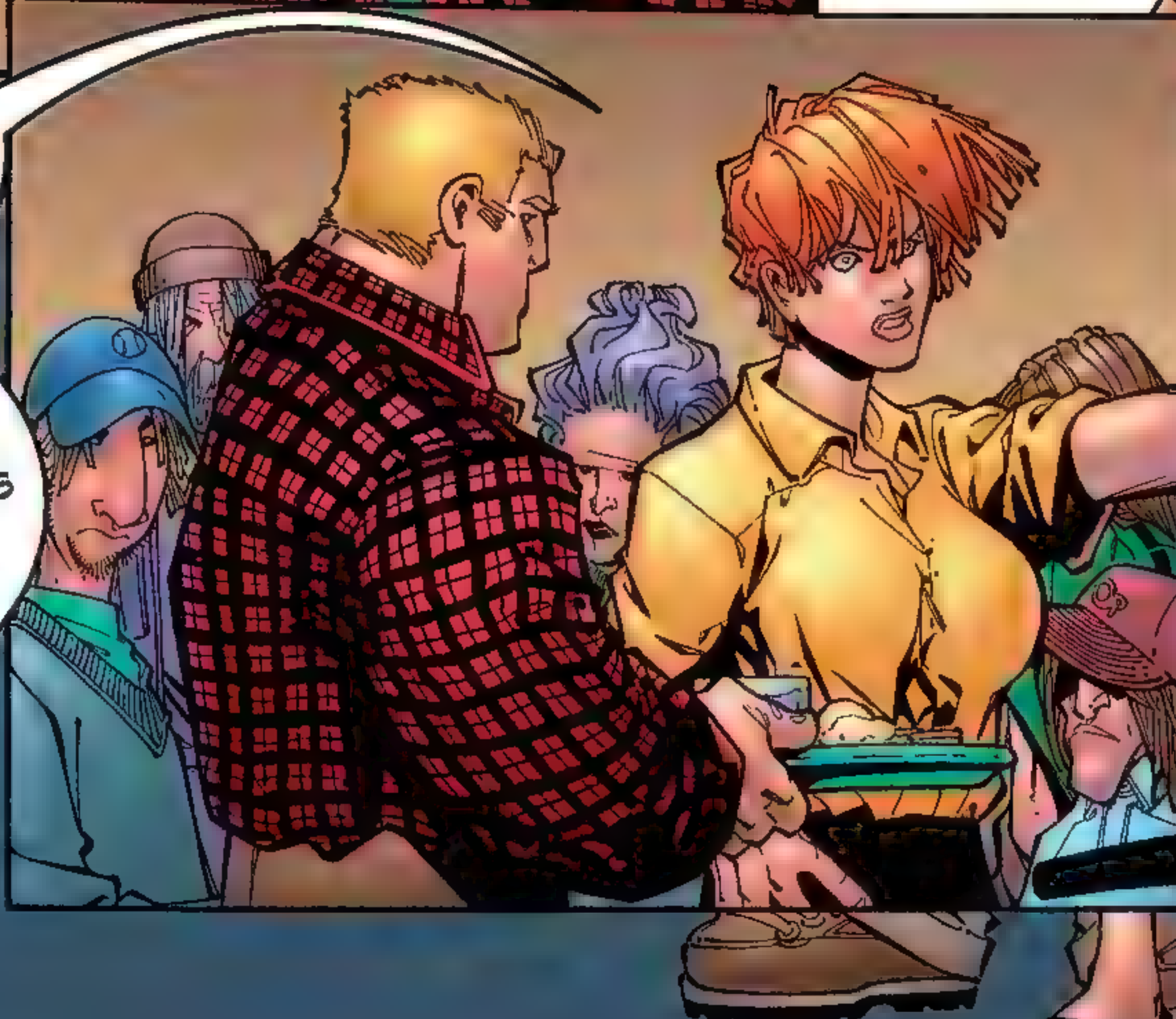
EMM? I'M HAVING TROUBLE GETTING THROUGH TO THE NEW GIRL.

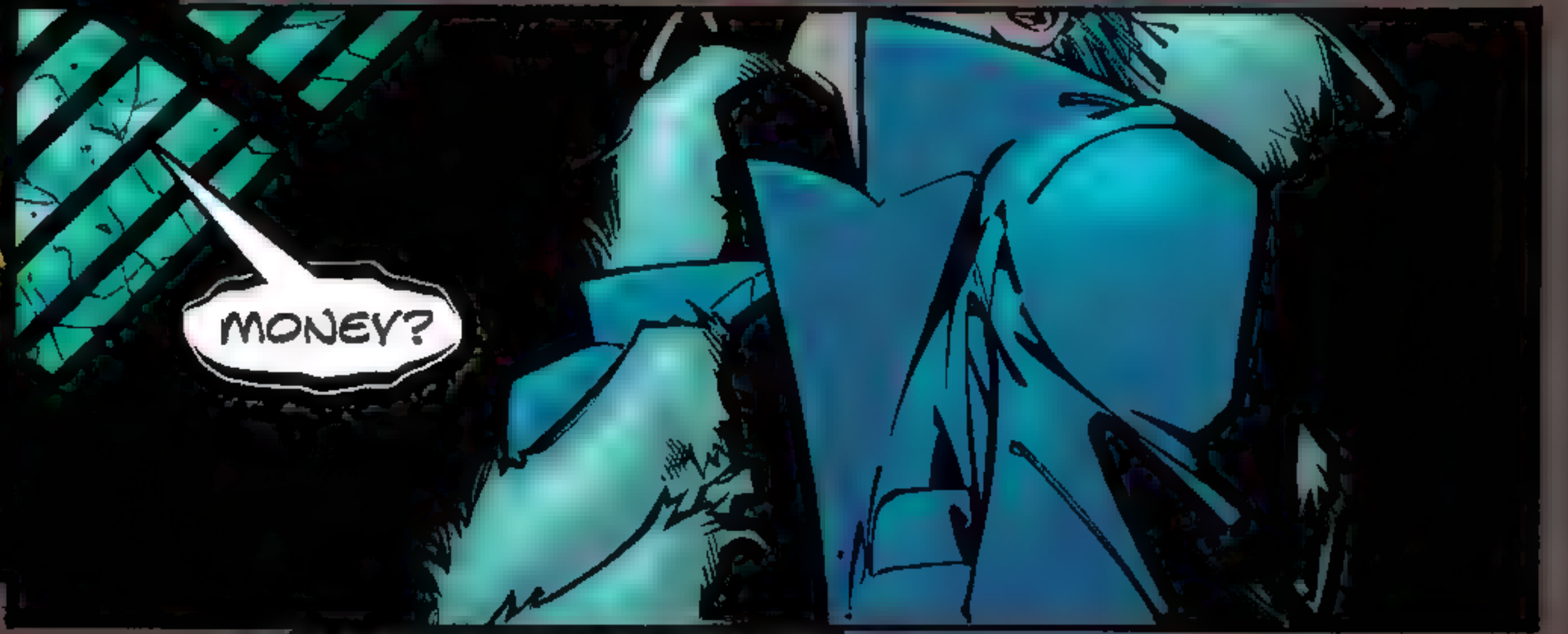
THAT TATTOO LOOKS FOREIGN--

LET HER GET USED TO US, JEFF -- MAYBE SHE'LL SETTLE DOWN AND EAT LATER.

LISTEN, WE CAN'T MAKE THEM ACCEPT OUR HELP. AND YOU CAN'T KEEP GETTING PERSONALLY INVOLVED... I'VE TOLD YOU THAT TOO MANY TIMES BEFORE...

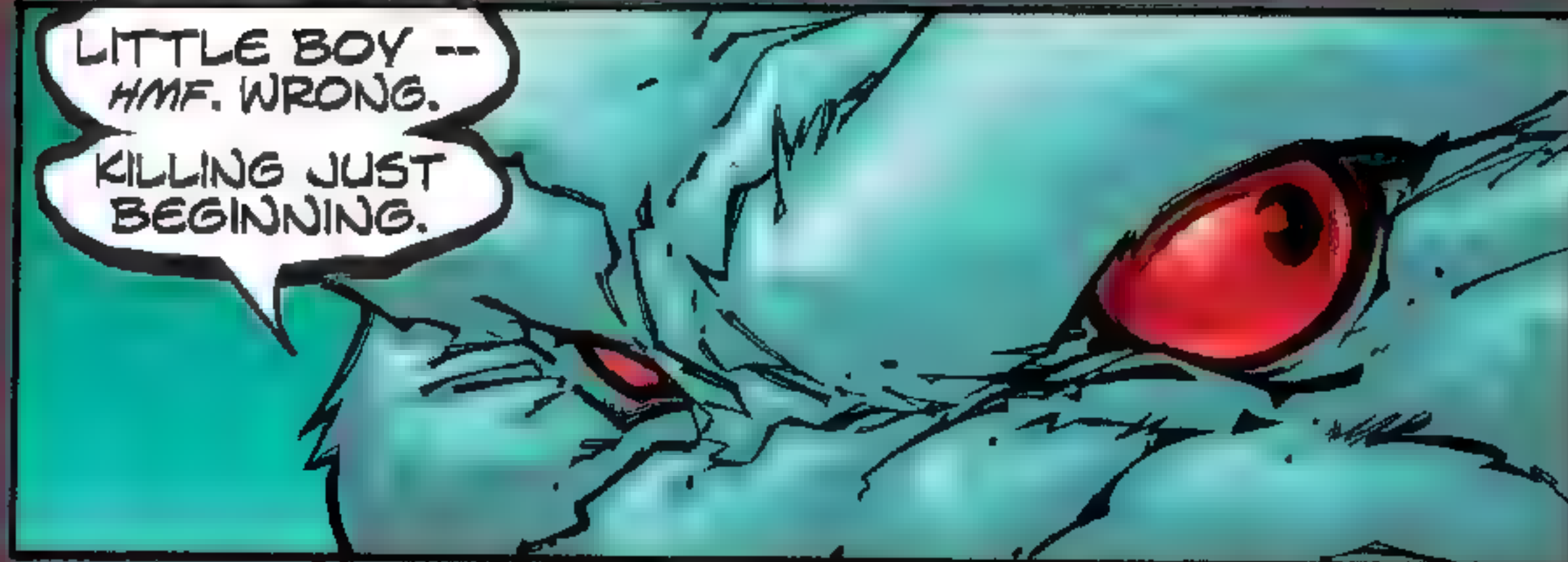
DON'T LET YOUR IMAGINATION RUN AWAY WITH YOU AGAIN...







I AM SO DAMNED SICK OF ALL THE KILLING --
-- OF SMELLING BLOOD EVERY TIME I PASS ANOTHER ALLEY-WAY.
THE KILLING STOPS NOW!

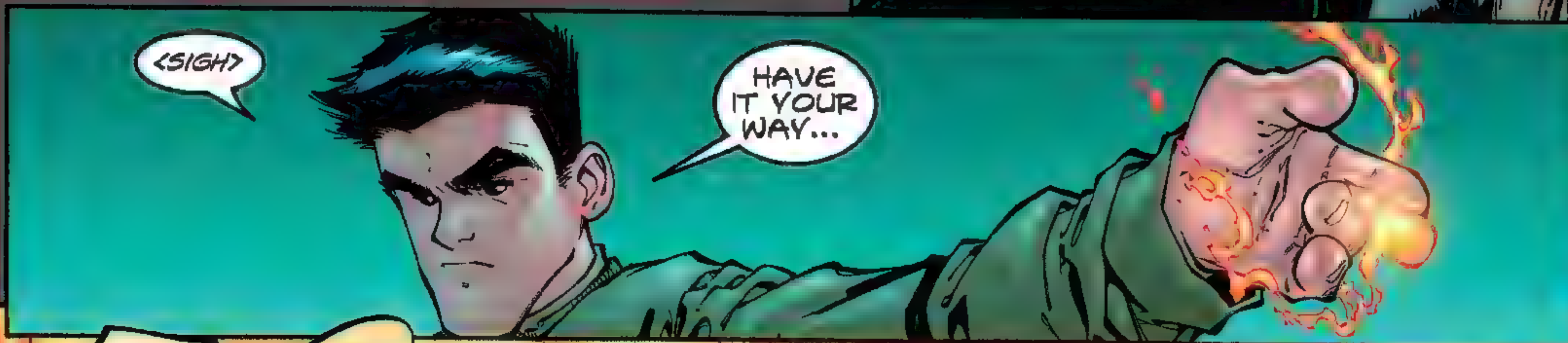


LITTLE BOY --
HMF. WRONG.
KILLING JUST BEGINNING.



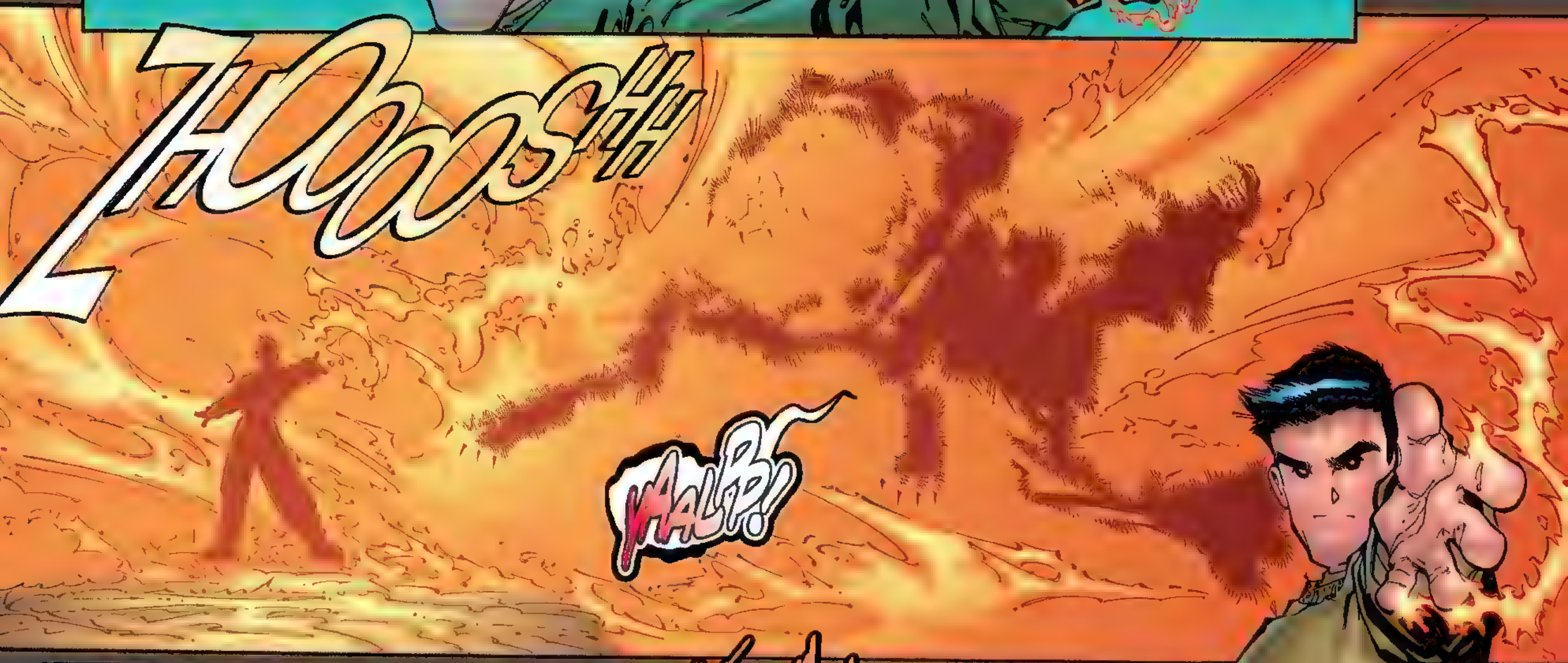
MY KILLING.
YOUR DYING.

SS
NCKER



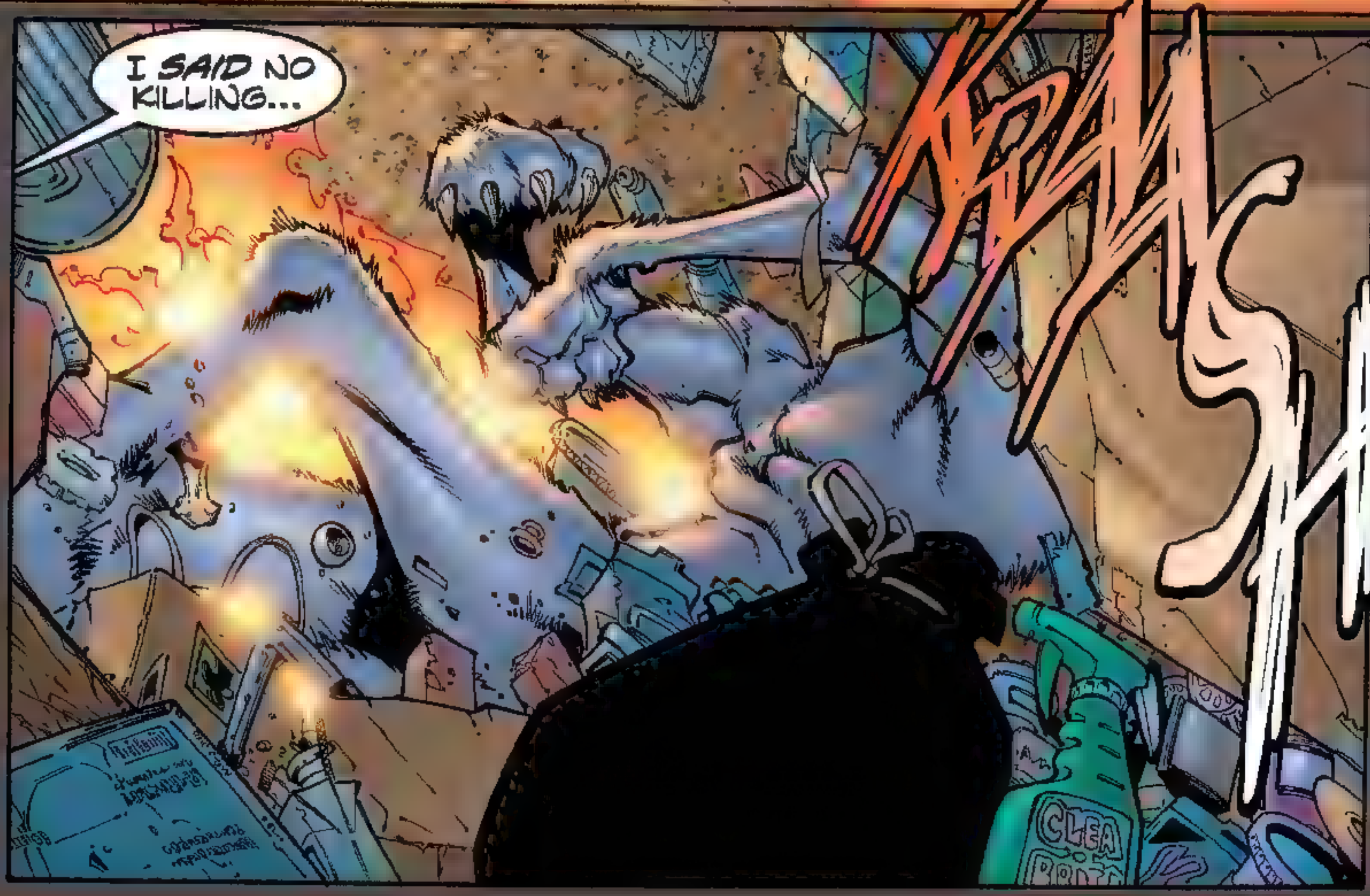
<SIGH>

HAVE IT YOUR WAY...



BOOSH!

WALP!

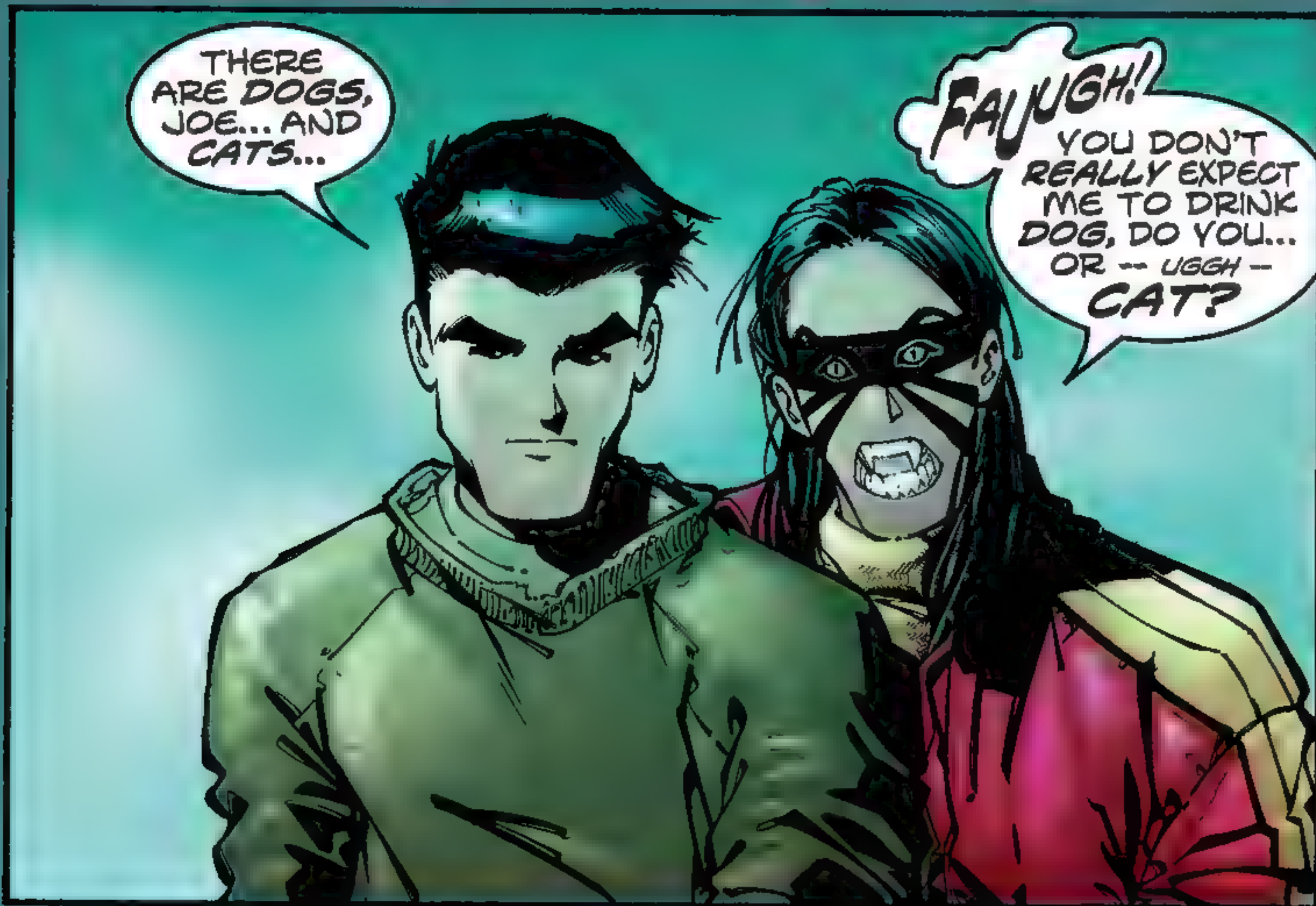
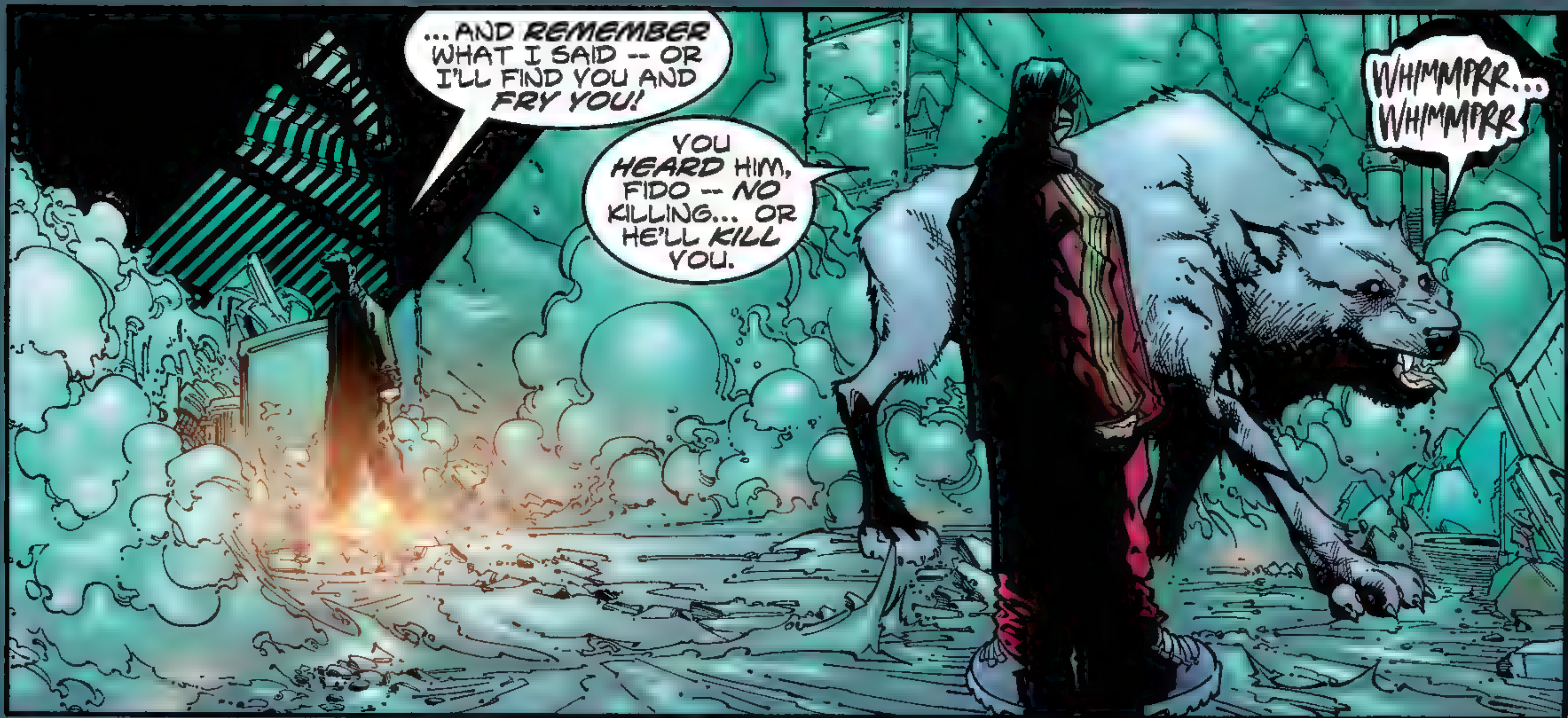


I SAID NO KILLING...

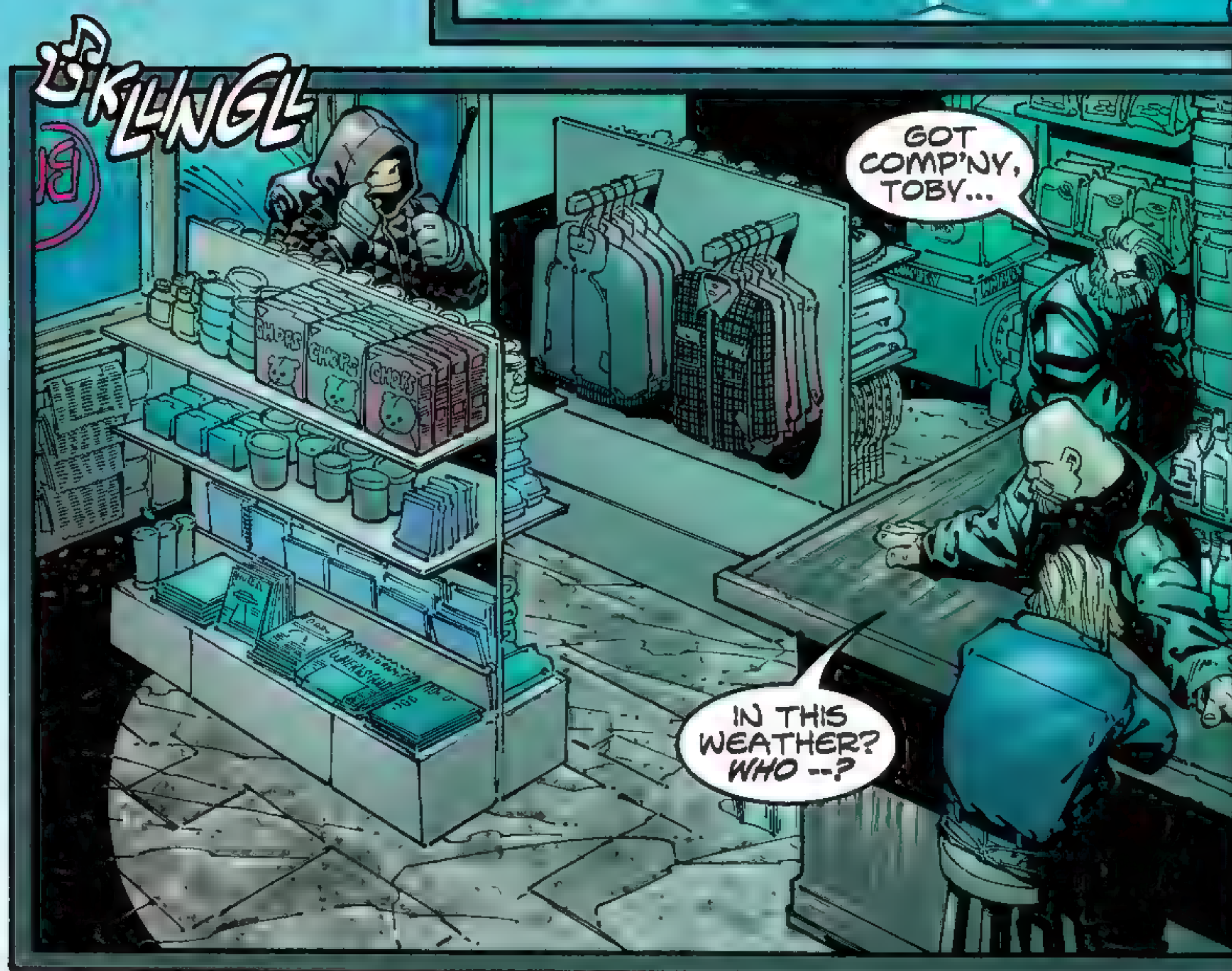
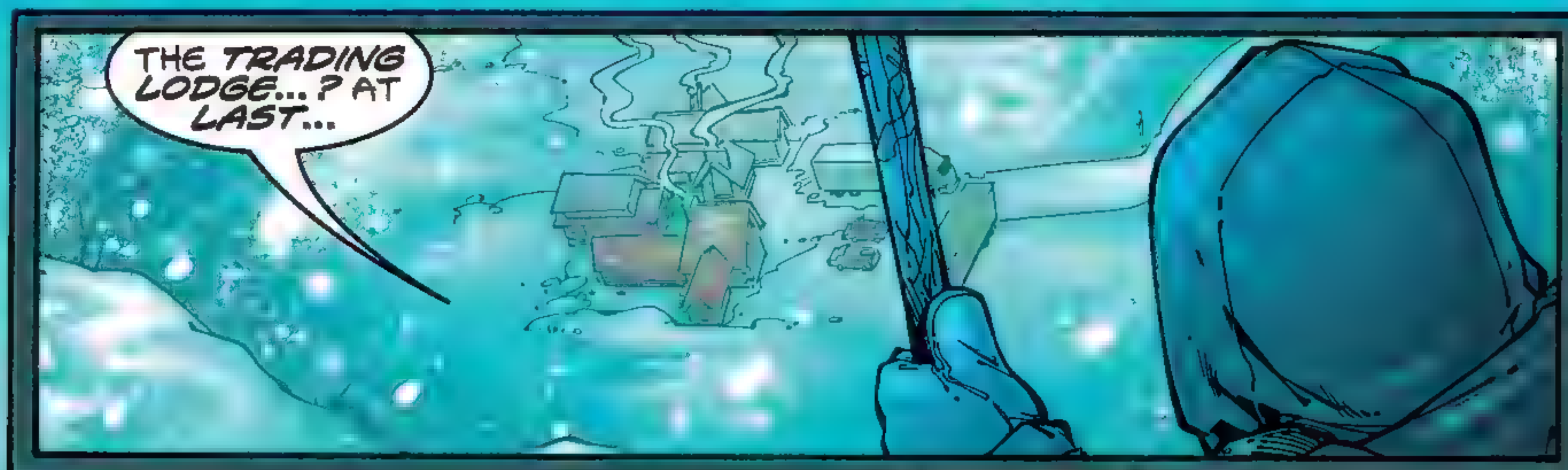
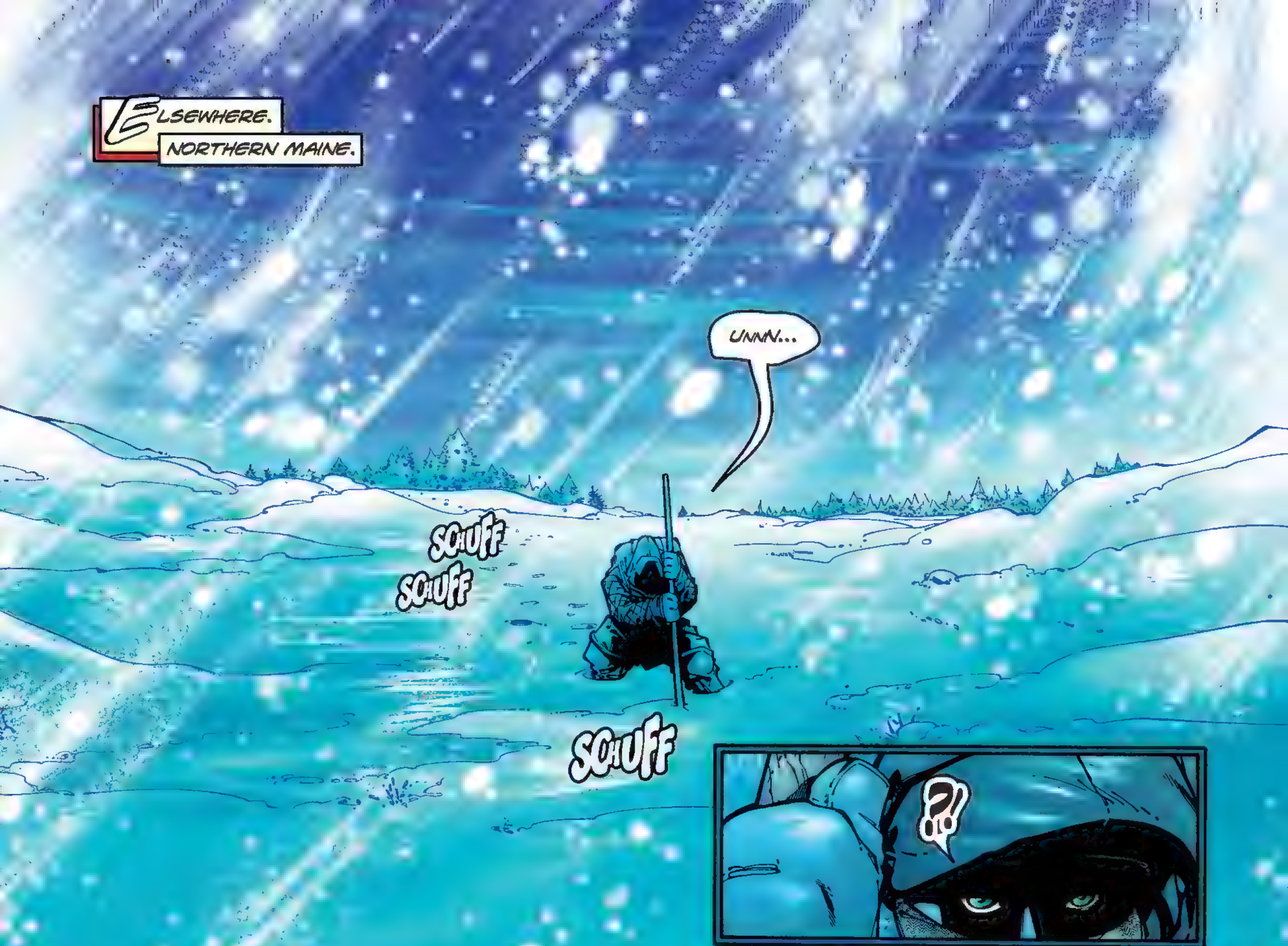
KRA

...I MEANT NO KILLING.
GET OUT OF HERE...





ELSEWHERE.
NORTHERN MAINE.

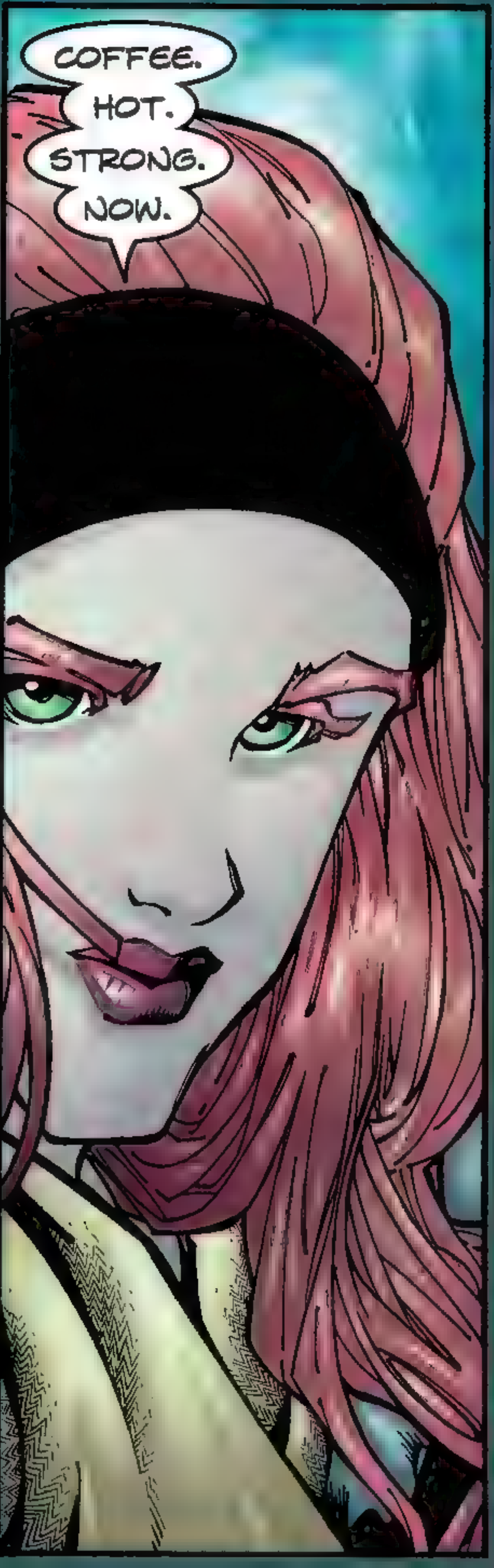




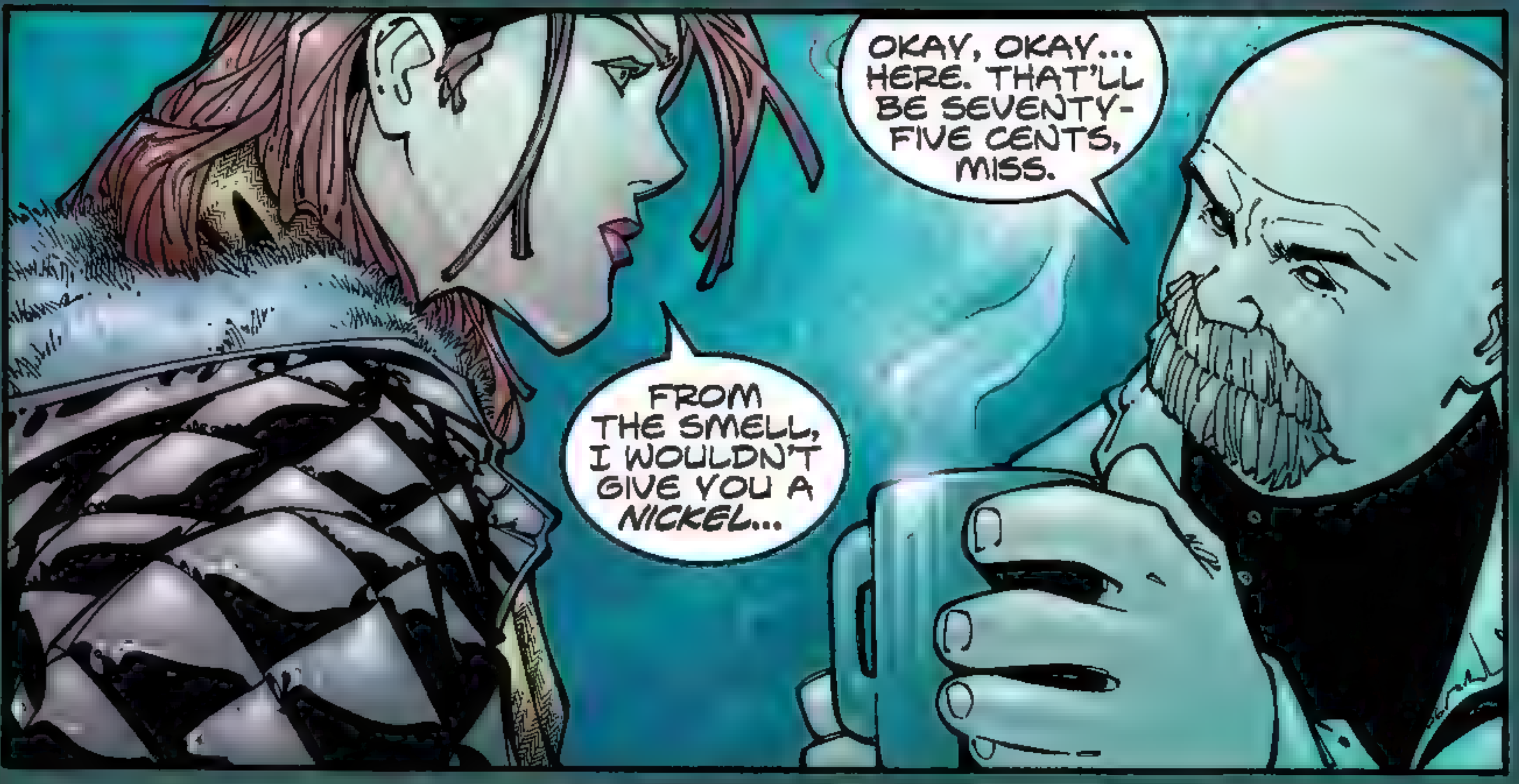
I GUESS
YA FOUND
ME, THEN,
MISS --
HAW!

GET YOU
SOMETHING?
COFFEE.

COFFEE?
WITH NO
BOOZE
INNIT?!



COFFEE.
HOT.
STRONG.
NOW.



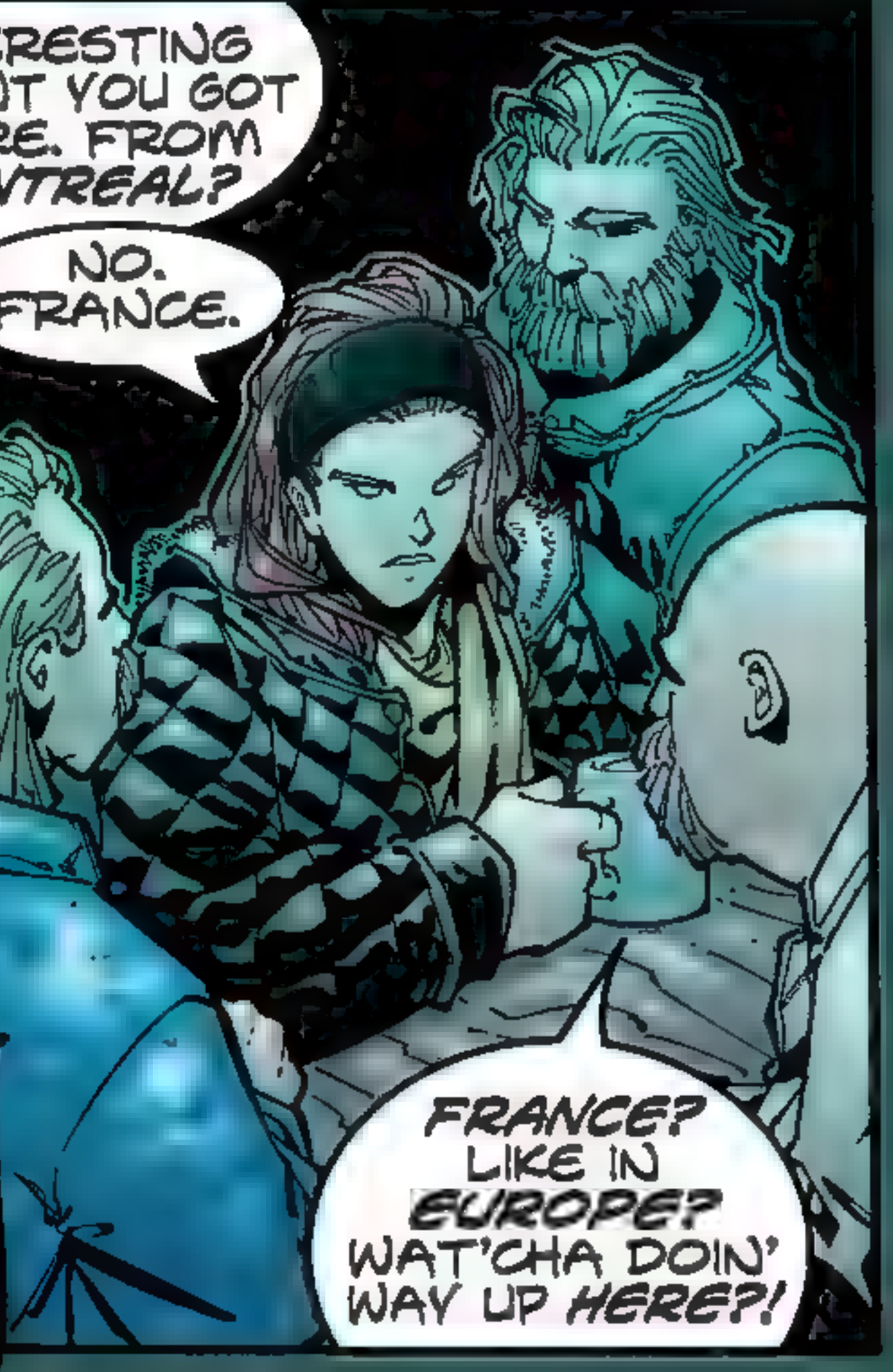
FROM
THE SMELL,
I WOULDN'T
GIVE YOU A
NICKEL...

OKAY, OKAY...
HERE. THAT'LL
BE SEVENTY-
FIVE CENTS,
MISS.



...BUT THE
WARMTH IS
WORTH A
DOLLAR
TO ME.

SUNRP



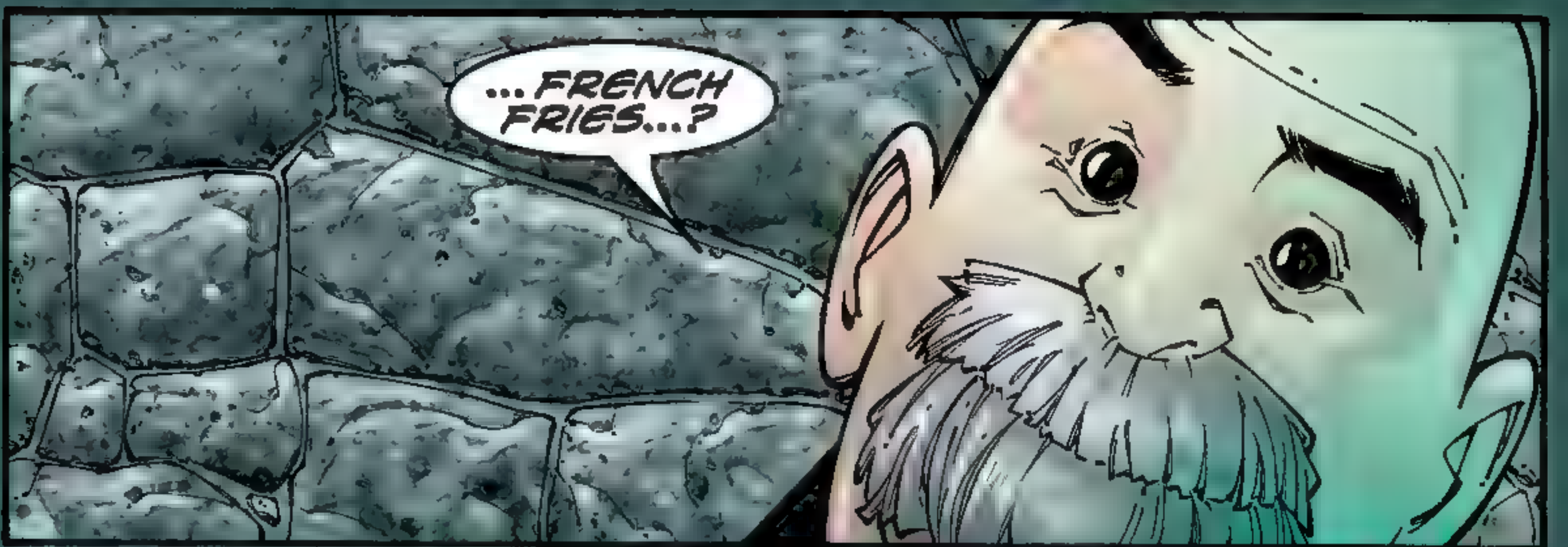
INNERESTING
ACCENT YOU GOT
THERE. FROM
MONTREAL?

NO.
FRANCE.

FRANCE?
LIKE IN
EUROPE?
WAT'CHA DOIN'
WAY UP HERE?!



UM... CAN I GET YOU SOMETHING TO EAT, MA'AM... I AIN'T GOT MUCH, BUT MAYBE SOME...



... FRENCH FRIES...?



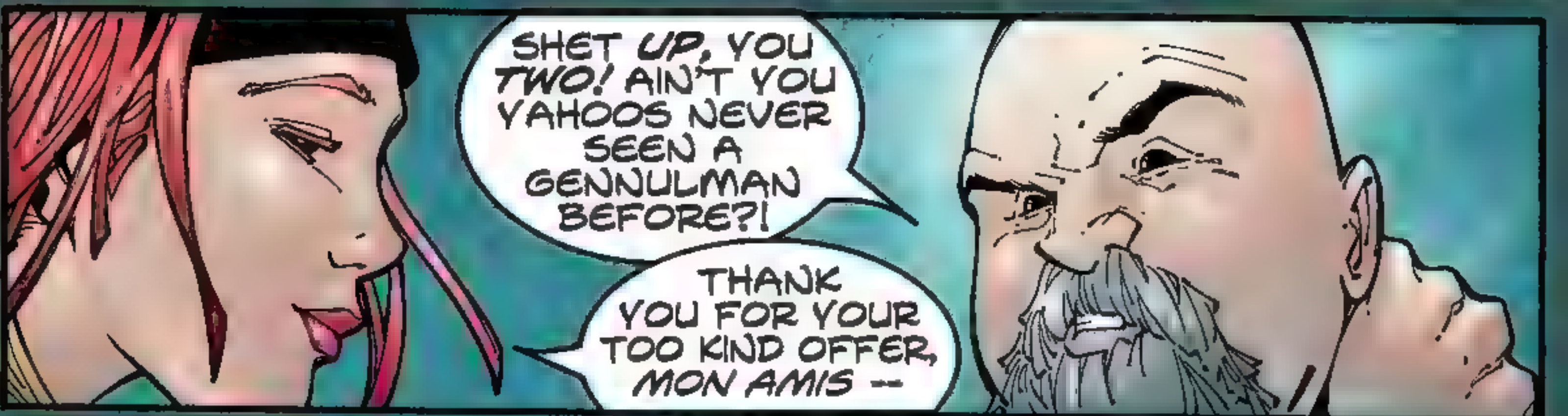
FRENCH...



... FRIES -- GULP?!



OFFERIN' HER SOME CUE-ZINE FROM HOME, EH, TOBY --?



SHUT UP, YOU TWO! AIN'T YOU YAHOOOS NEVER SEEN A GENNULMAN BEFORE?!

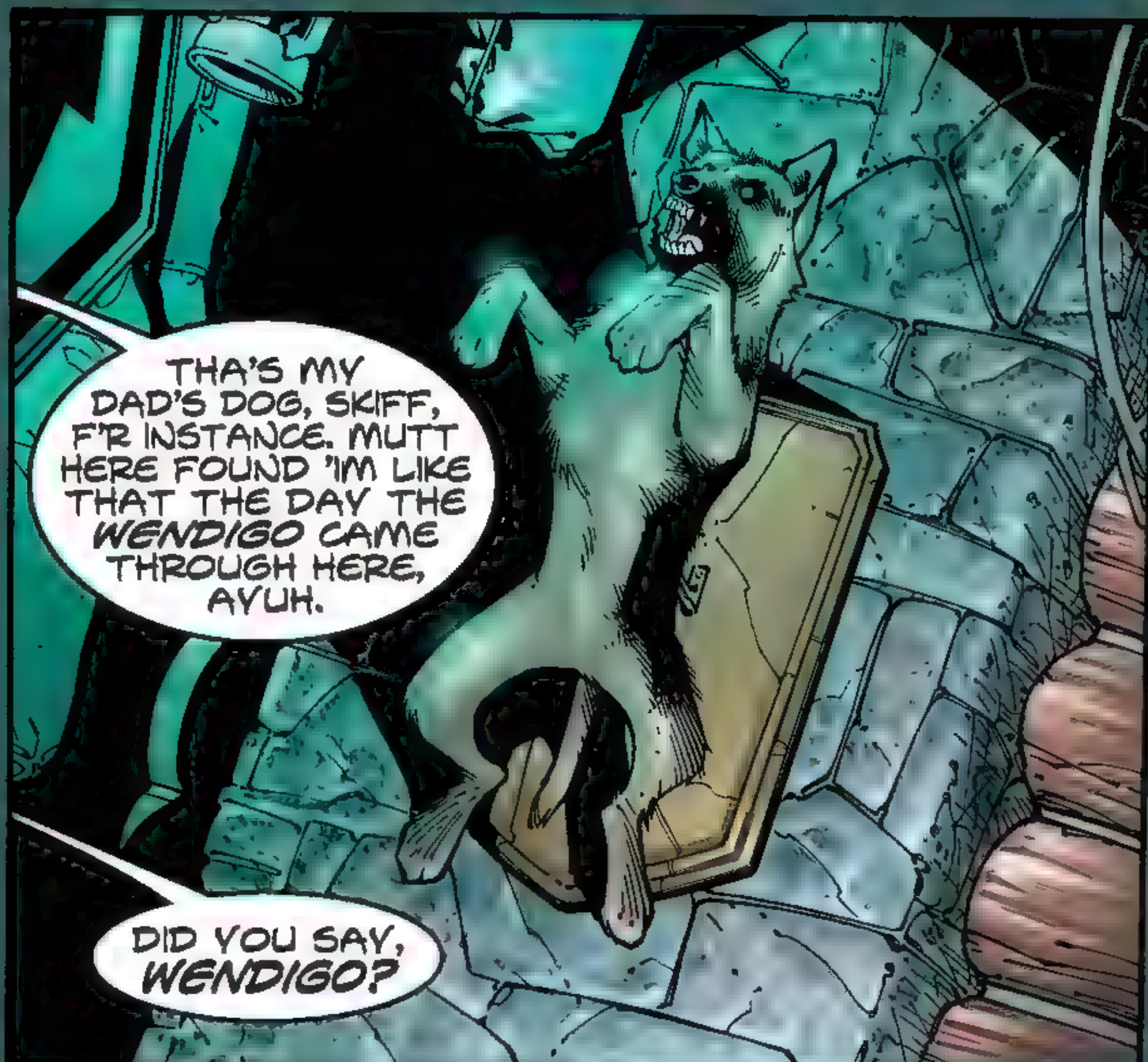
THANK YOU FOR YOUR TOO KIND OFFER, MON AMIS --



-- BUT I MUST BE MOVING ON SOON.

BEFORE I GO, I WONDER IF YOU WOULD EXPLAIN YOUR ESTABLISHMENT'S RATHER... UNIQUE DECOR?

IT'S JUST STUFF WE FIND AROUND HERE AND IN THE WOODS...



THA'S MY DAD'S DOG, SKIFF, F'R INSTANCE. MUTT HERE FOUND 'IM LIKE THAT THE DAY THE WENDIGO CAME THROUGH HERE, AYUH.

DID YOU SAY, WENDIGO?



YOU MEAN THE BEAST MAN OF LEGEND...?

HE AIN'T NO LEGEND, MISSY -- HE'S REAL AND I SEEN 'IM! BIG AND FURRY AND FIERCE HE WAS, LIKE A BIG OL' ANIMAL MAN!



TELL HER,
MUTT...
THE WHOLE
DEAL...

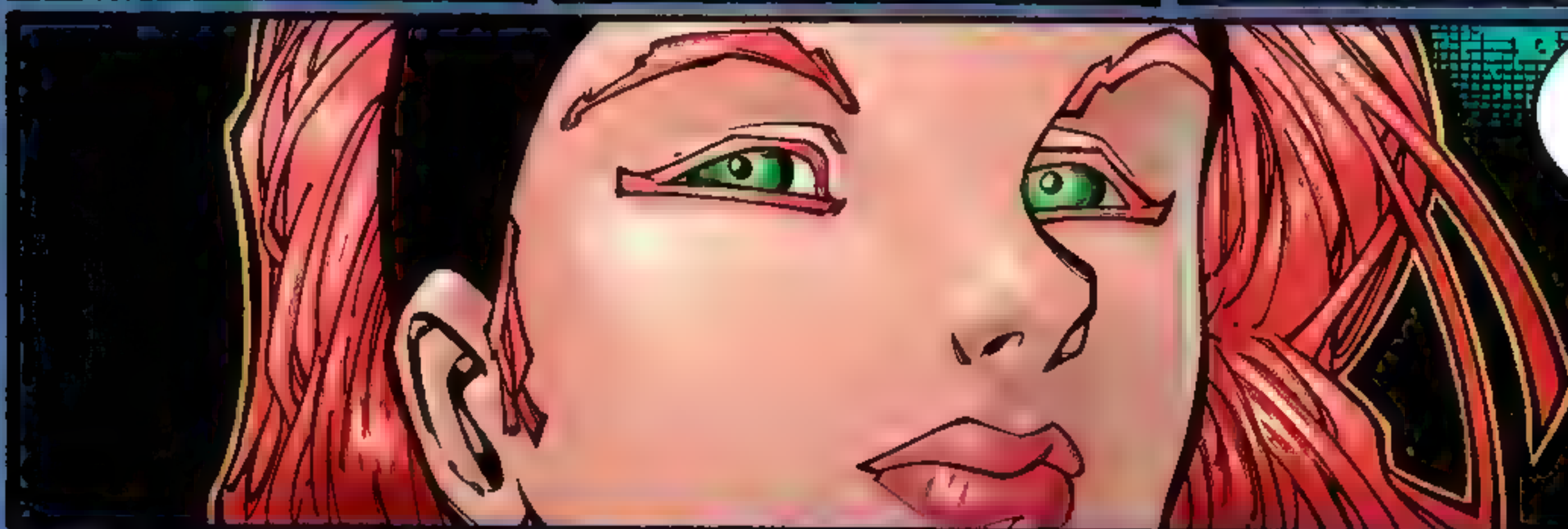


YEAH, WE AIN'T HEARD
IT BUT A ZILLION
TIMES...



IT WAS NIGHT
UNDER A FULL
MOON.

BEASTIE CAME
STALKIN' OUT OF
THE WOODS JUST
NORTH OF HERE BOLD
AS YOU PLEASE. HE
LOOKED LIKE THAT
MOVIE CREEP, THE
WOLFMAN...
... BUT
WIT'OUT THE PANTS.

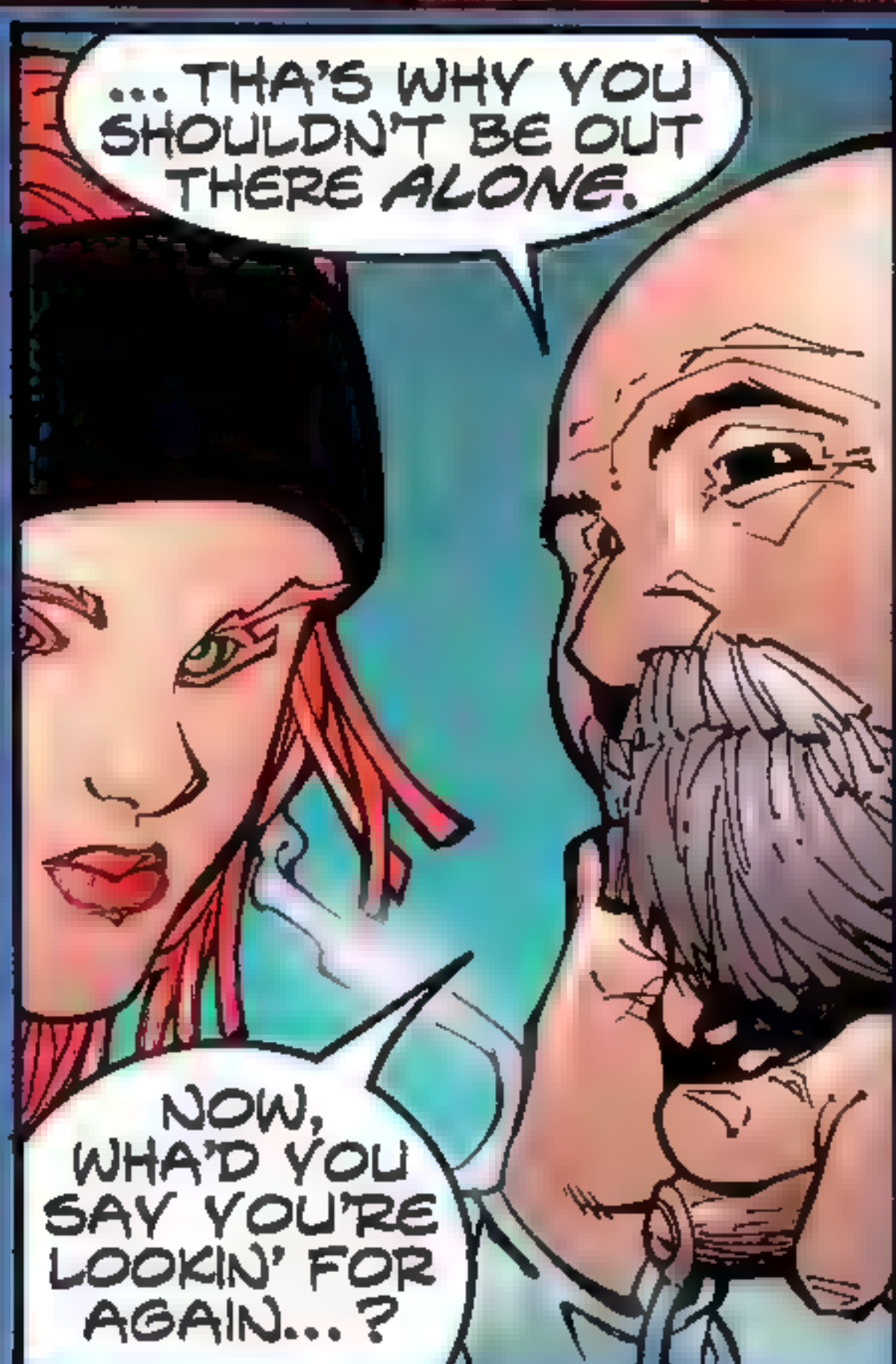


SKIFF STARTED FOLLOWIN' EM,
BARKIN' LIKE NUTS -- AND THE
THING **ROARED** AT SKIFF. POOR
BOY JUST DROPPED DEAD
ON THE SPOT...

I SEE.
MUMMIFIED
THE POOCH
WITH ITS
BREATH?

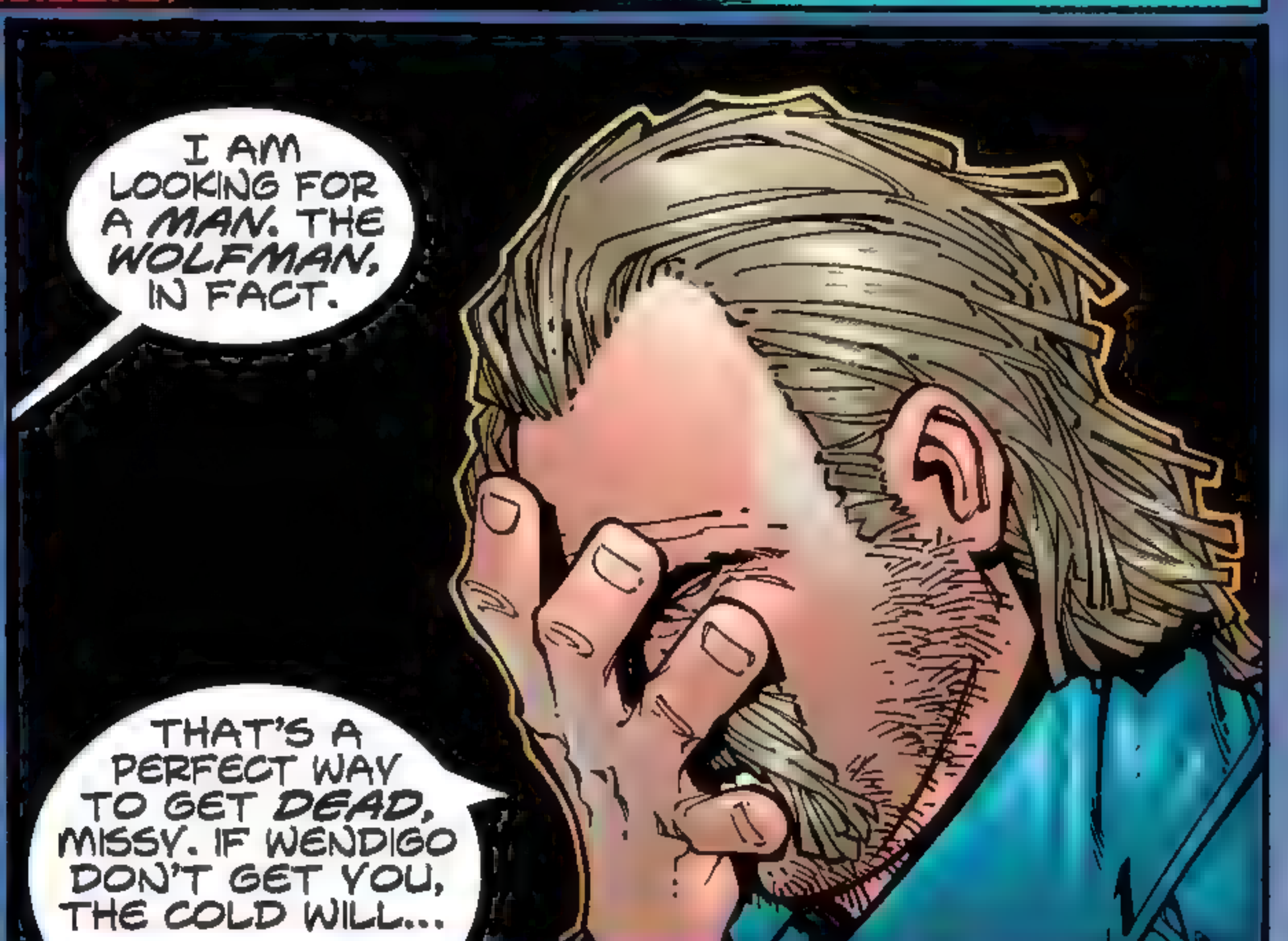


THE
WOLFMAN
IS **REAL**
ENOUGH,
MA'AM...



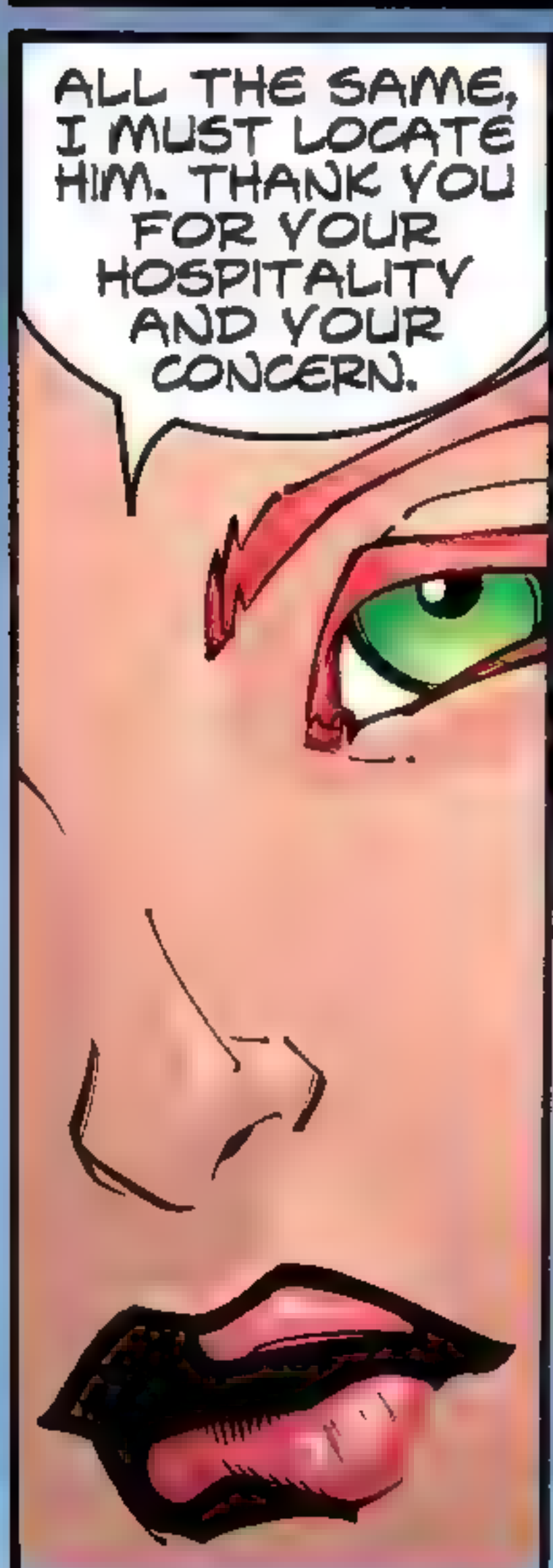
... THA'S WHY YOU
SHOULDN'T BE OUT
THERE **ALONE**.

NOW,
WHA'D YOU
SAY YOU'RE
LOOKIN' FOR
AGAIN... ?

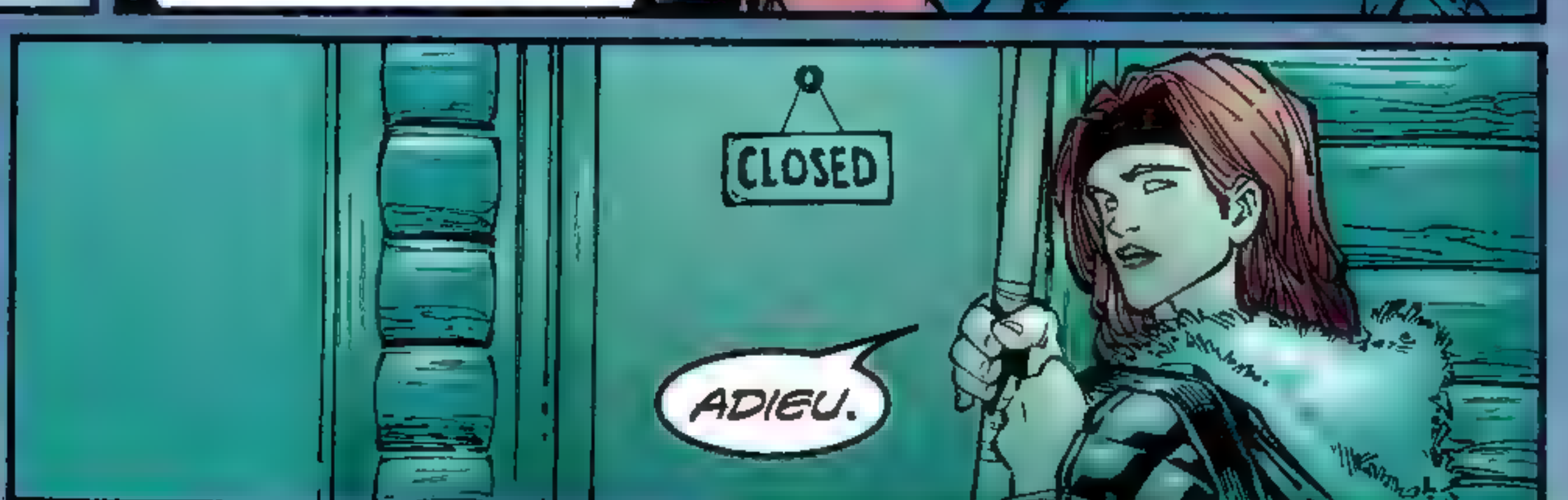
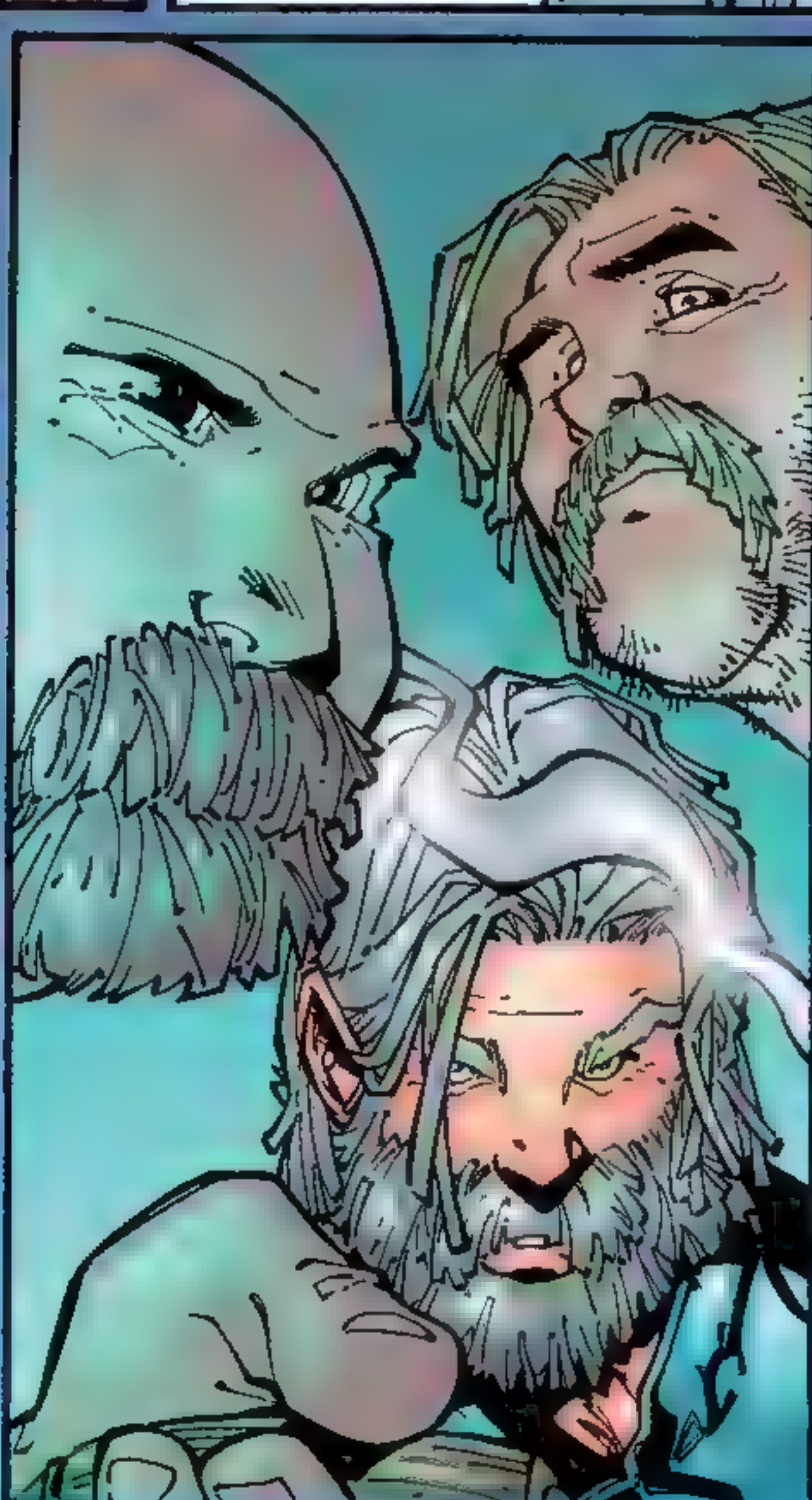


I AM
LOOKING FOR
A **MAN**. THE
WOLFMAN,
IN FACT.

THAT'S A
PERFECT WAY
TO GET **DEAD**,
MISSY. IF WENDIGO
DON'T GET YOU,
THE COLD WILL...



ALL THE SAME,
I MUST LOCATE
HIM. THANK YOU
FOR YOUR
HOSPITALITY
AND YOUR
CONCERN.

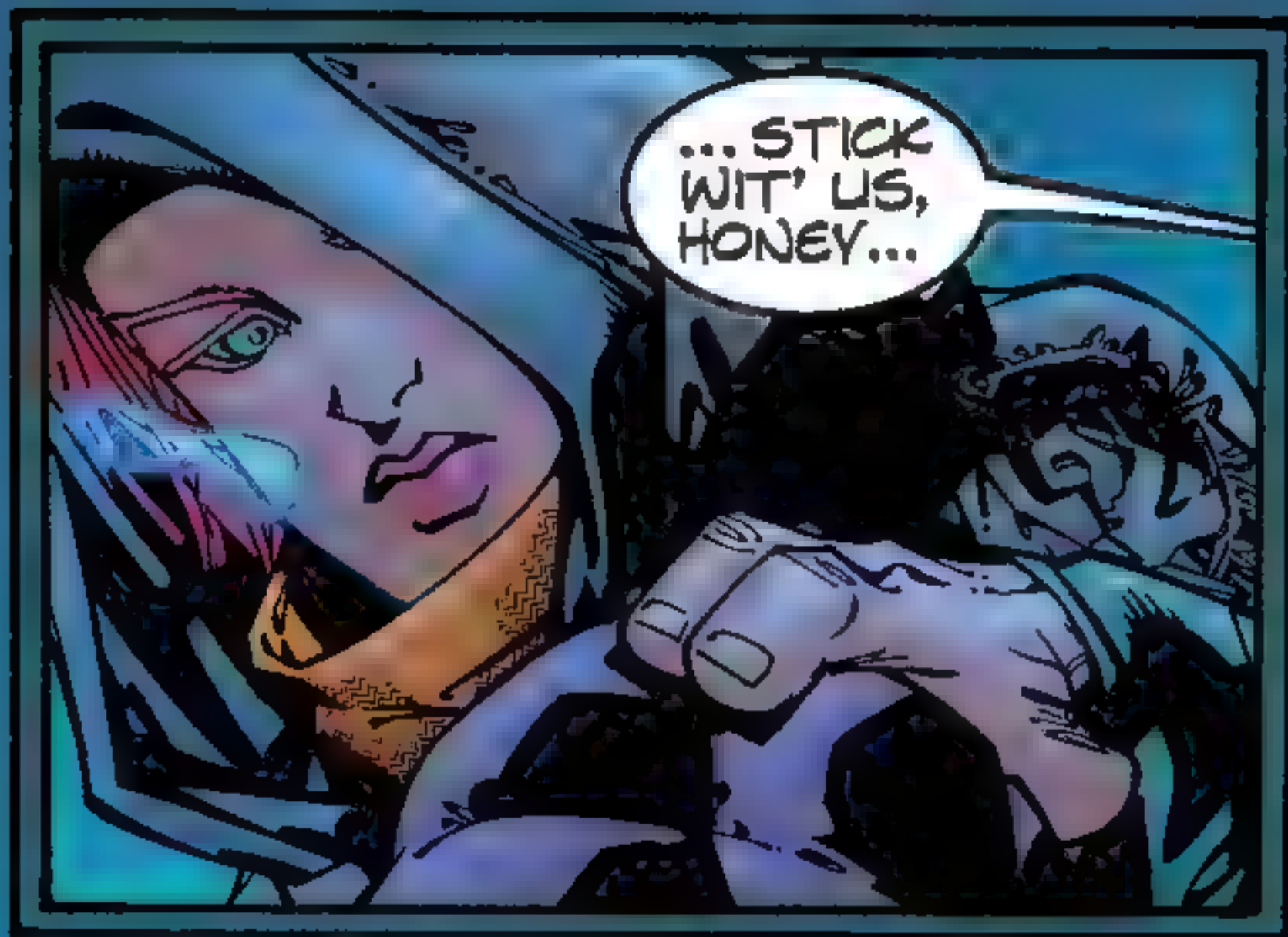


ADIEU.



LISTEN, MISSY -- IF YOU NEED
A MAN WITH LOTS OF **ANIMAL**
CHARM, I'M YOUR GUY!

MY BROTHER,
ROSCOE'S GOT IT
TOO. WE CAN GIVE
YOU A REAL
GOOD TIME...

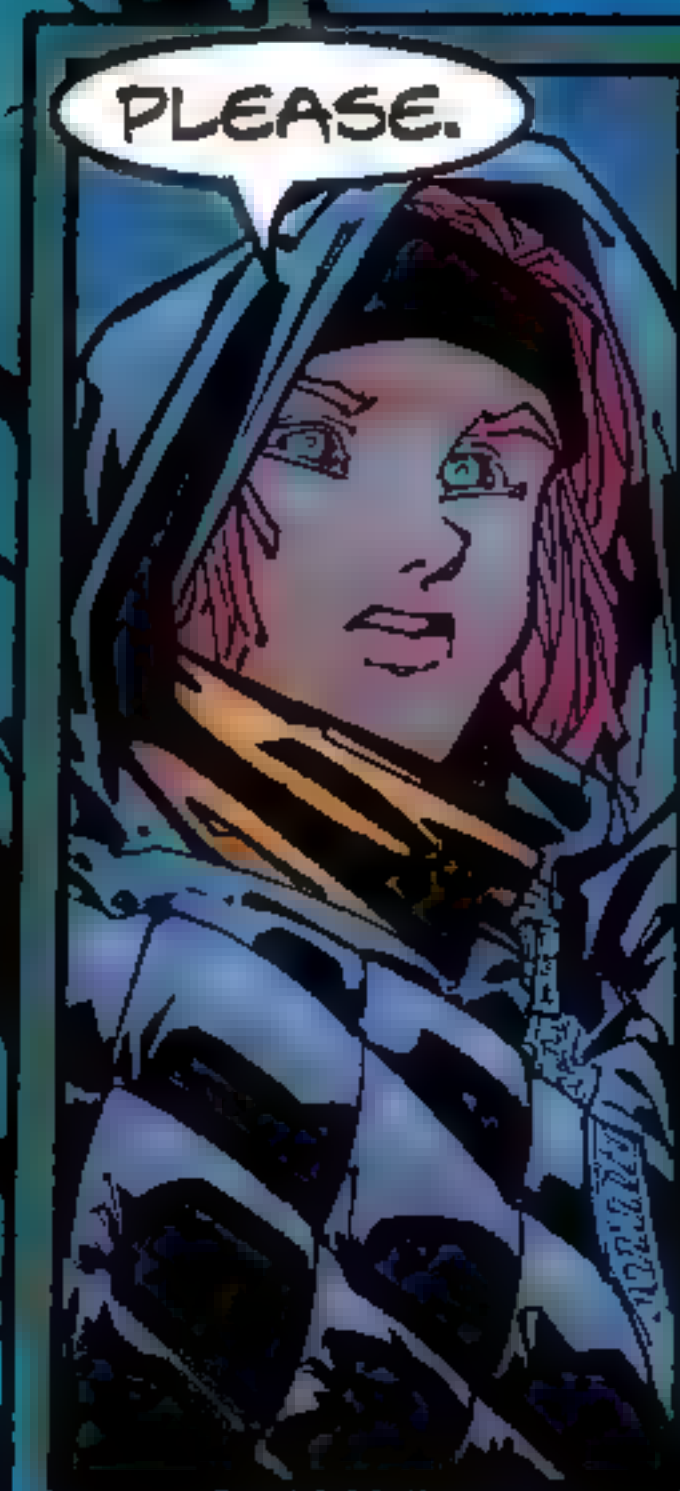
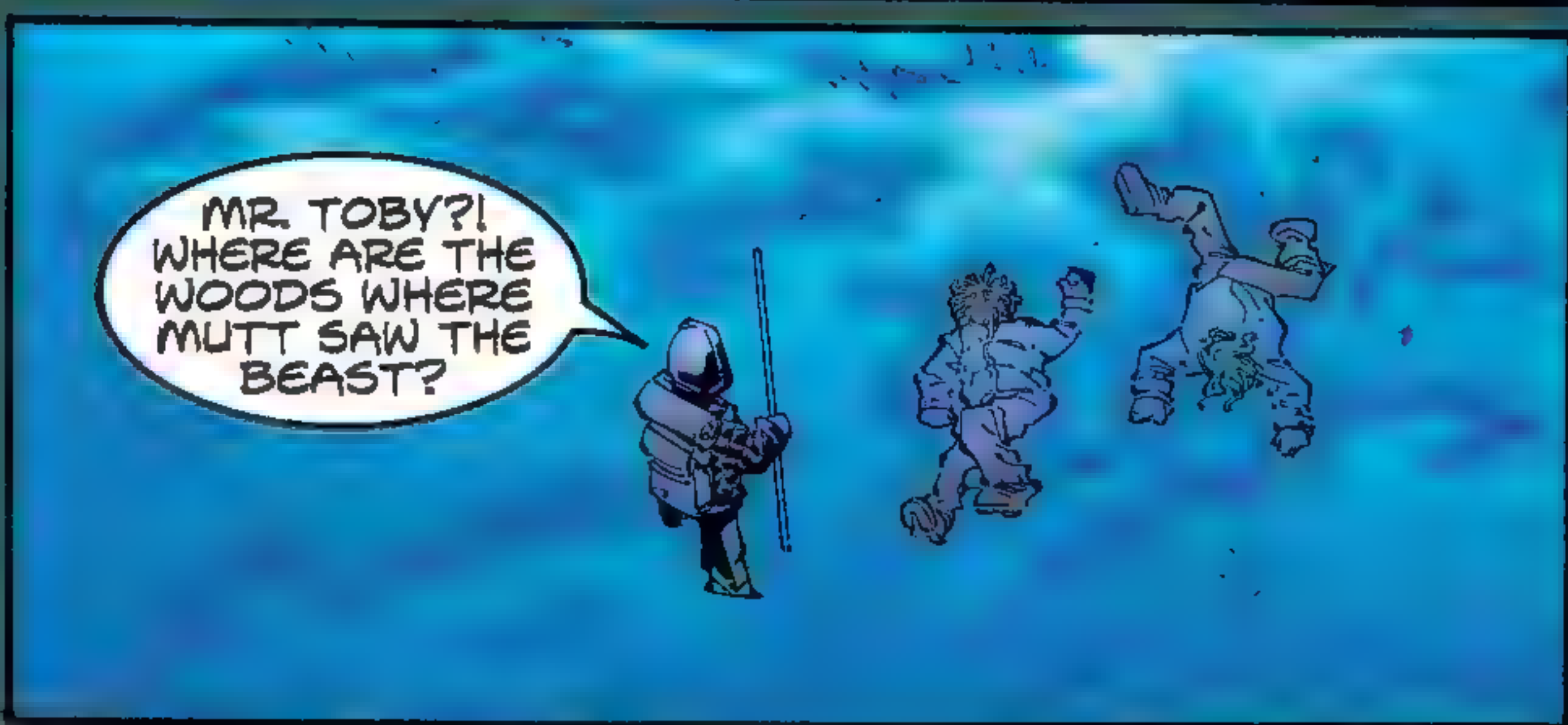
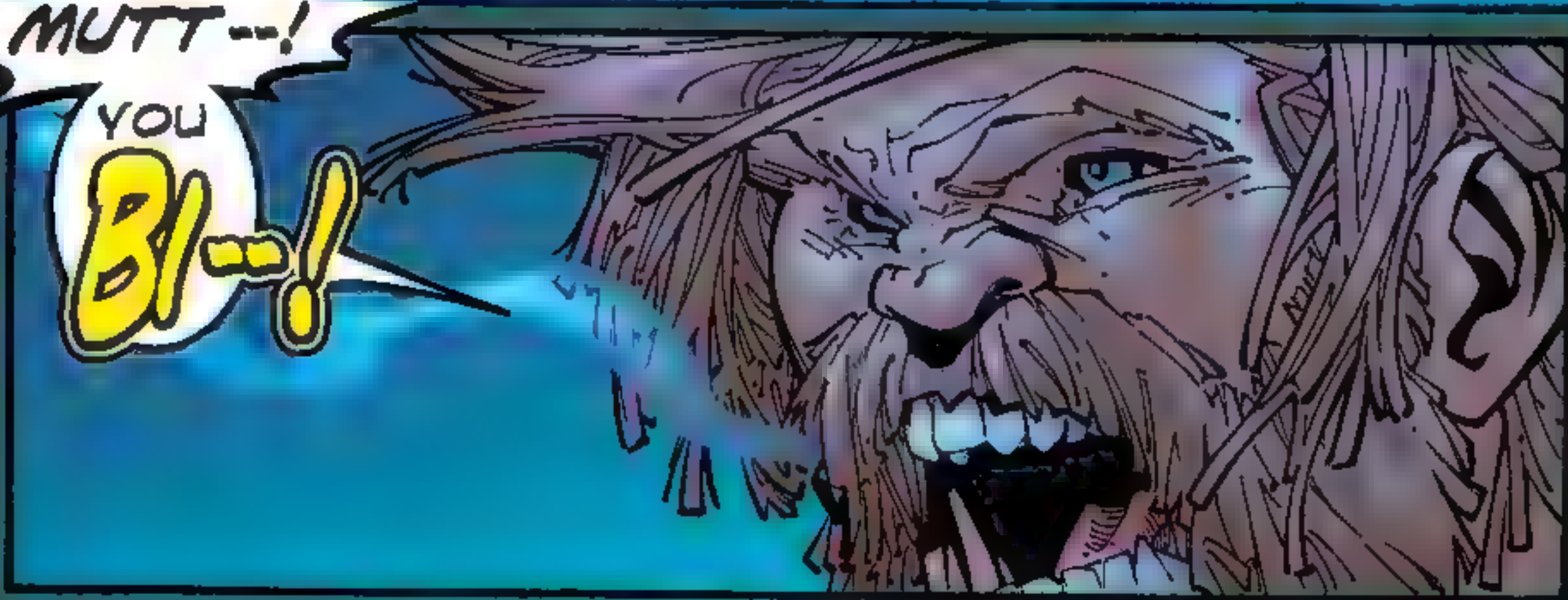


-- WHIFF

NON.



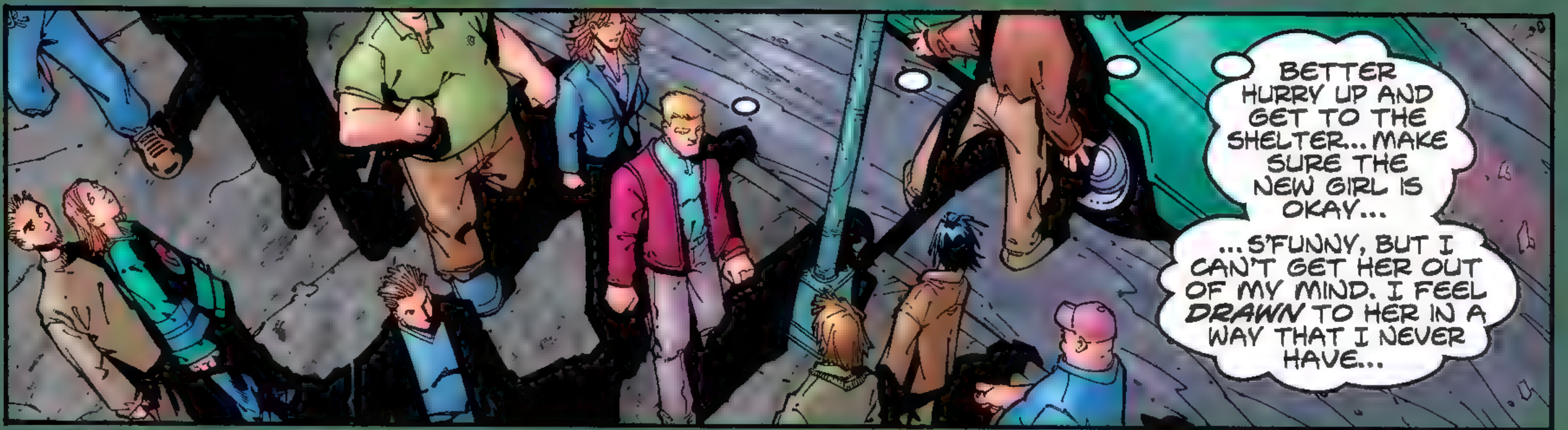
MUTT--!
YOU
BI--!



-- NO ONE SHOULD
GO THERE, MA'AM,
TRULY...

YET, I
MUST.
MERCI.

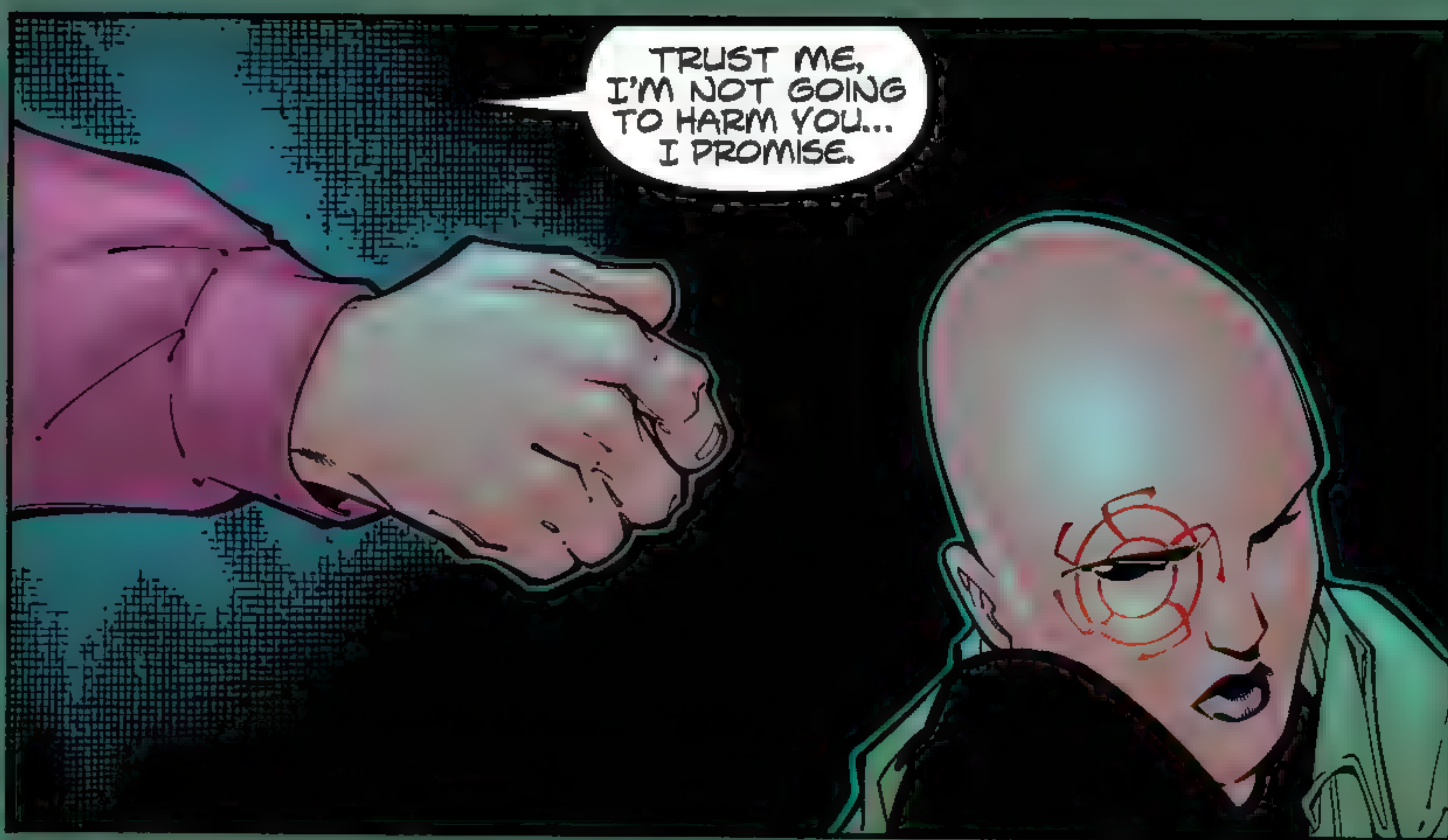






YOU RAN AWAY FROM THE SHELTER? WELL, I GUESS I DON'T BLAME YOU...

...O'MON OUT -- I'LL HELP YOU FIND SOMEPLACE BETTER.



TRUST ME, I'M NOT GOING TO HARM YOU... I PROMISE.

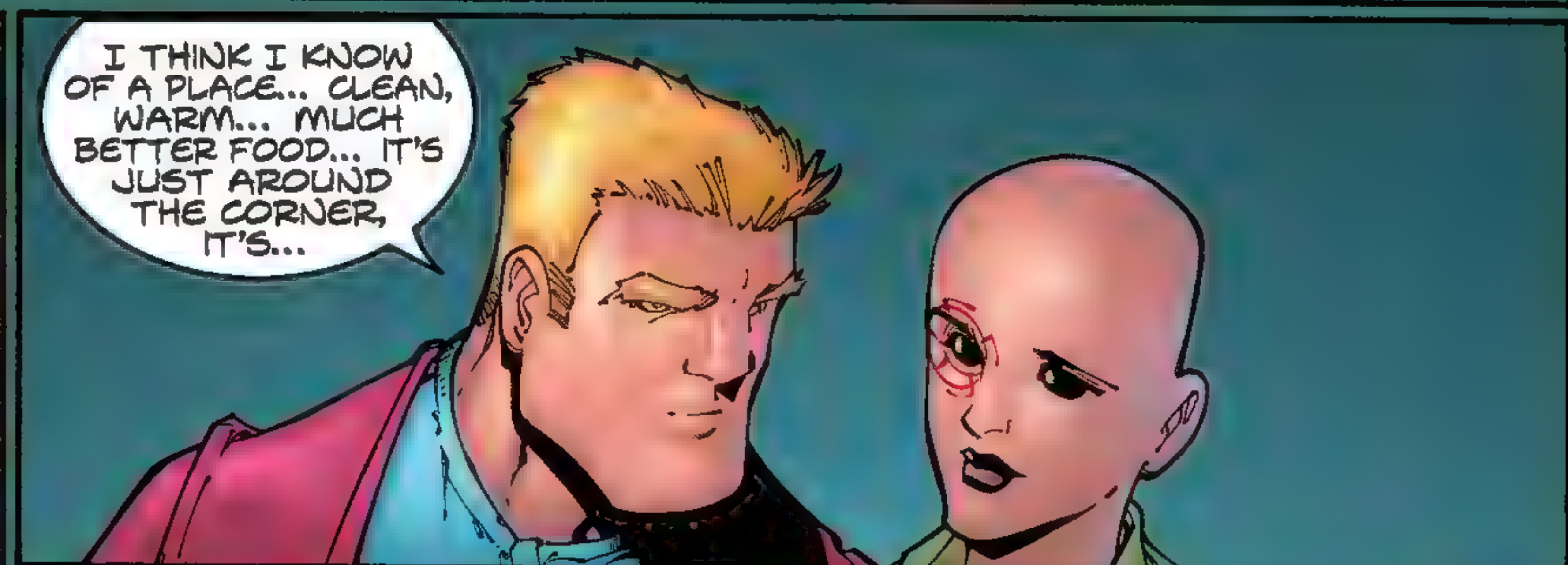


...PLEASE.



I'M SUPPOSED TO BE AT THE SHELTER BY NOW, BUT TAKING CARE OF YOU IS MORE IMPORTANT...

...WE HAVE TO FIND YOU A BETTER PLACE... BUT WHERE --?



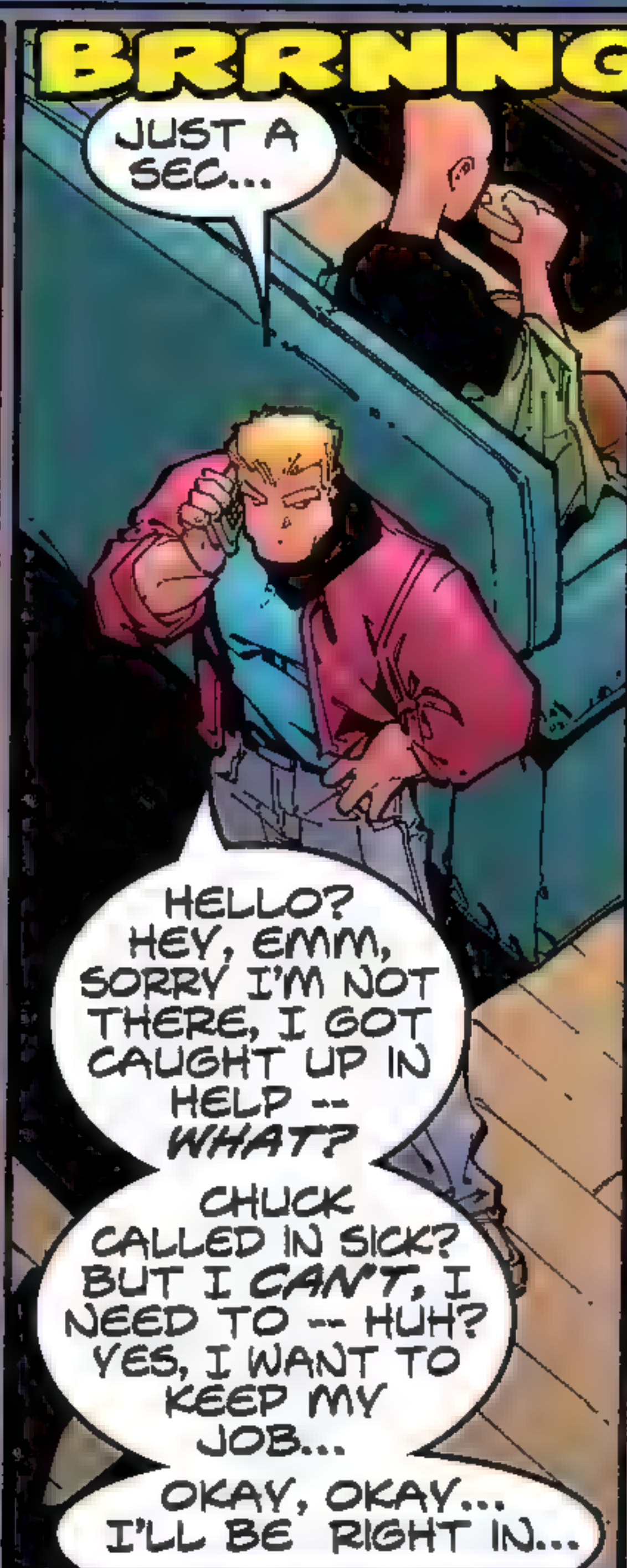
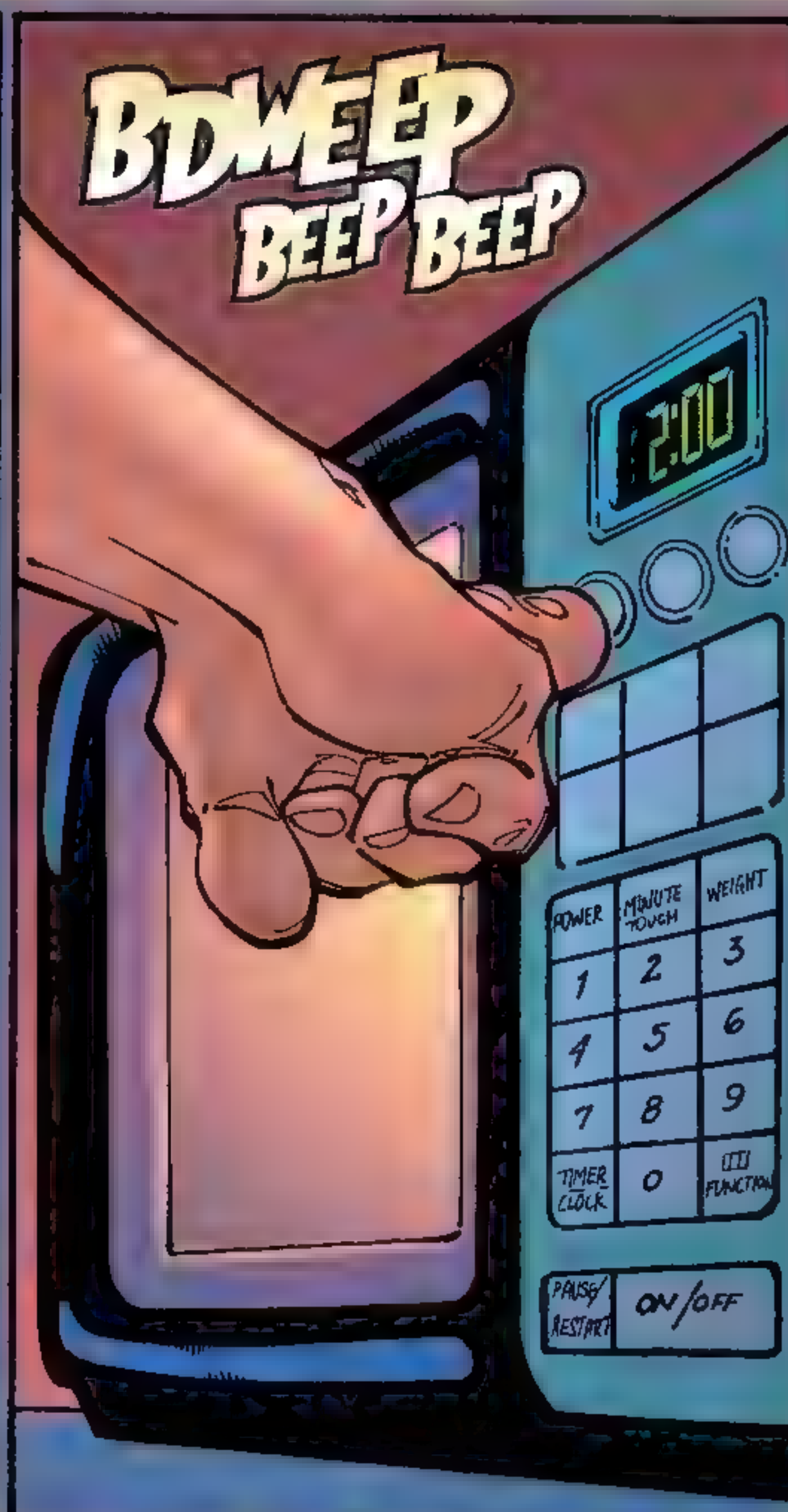
I THINK I KNOW OF A PLACE... CLEAN, WARM... MUCH BETTER FOOD... IT'S JUST AROUND THE CORNER, IT'S...



...NOT MUCH, BUT IT'S HOME. WELCOME.

YOU CAN STAY WITH ME UNTIL WE FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO WITH YOU.

ALL ON THE UP-AND-UP, OF COURSE -- I'M A COMPLETE GENTLEMAN, I PROMISE.





OH... HI, MIZZ BISSETTE...

THERE YOU ARE, JEFFREY -- DID I SEE THAT YOU BROUGHT A WOMAN UP TO YOUR LOFT?



...

UM, YES... YES YOU DID. SHE'S A... A COUSIN OF MINE...

... SHE'S FALLEN ON HARD TIMES AND SHE'LL ONLY BE WITH ME UNTIL SHE GETS HER LIFE BACK TOGETHER.

YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN A GOOD TENANT, JEFFREY. IF YOU SAY THIS IS ON THE UP-AND-UP, I BELIEVE YOU.



IT IS, MIZZ BISSETTE, IT IS... THANKS.

NOW... I'VE GOTTA GET TO WORK...



SEE YOU LATER, MA'AM...

HEY...?



OOPS, MY FAULT -- SORRY...

WATCH WHERE YOU'RE GOIN', WHITE-BREAD...!



YOU'RE RIGHT, OF COURSE. THAT WAS VERY CLUMSY OF ME, AND I APOLOGIZE.

YEAH, WELL... YEAH... OKAY!

DOUGHT'A JUMP THIS PAYASO AND DRAIN 'IM! BUT, NOOO -- HIGH-AN'- MIGHTY ALEX WOULD GET HIS JOCKEYS IN A BUNCH --!



YOU'RE JEFFREY'S...
COUSIN, EH? WELL,
YOU BE NICE TO
THAT BOY,
HMM...?

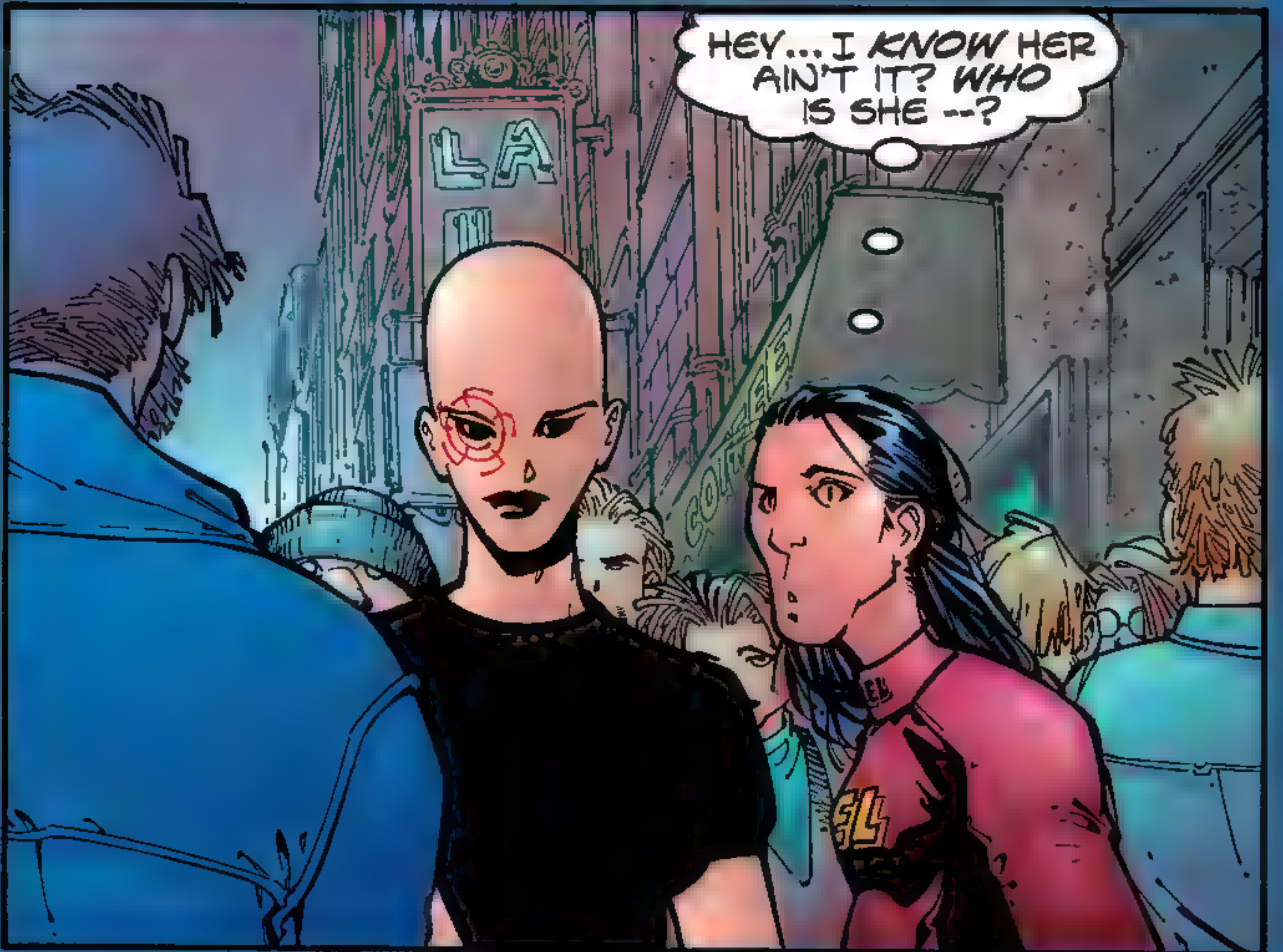
HE
DESERVES A
BREAK, YOU KNOW --
HE'S ALWAYS TAKING
CARE OF EVERYONE
ELSE, S'BOUT
TIME SOMEONE
TOOK CARE
OF HIM...



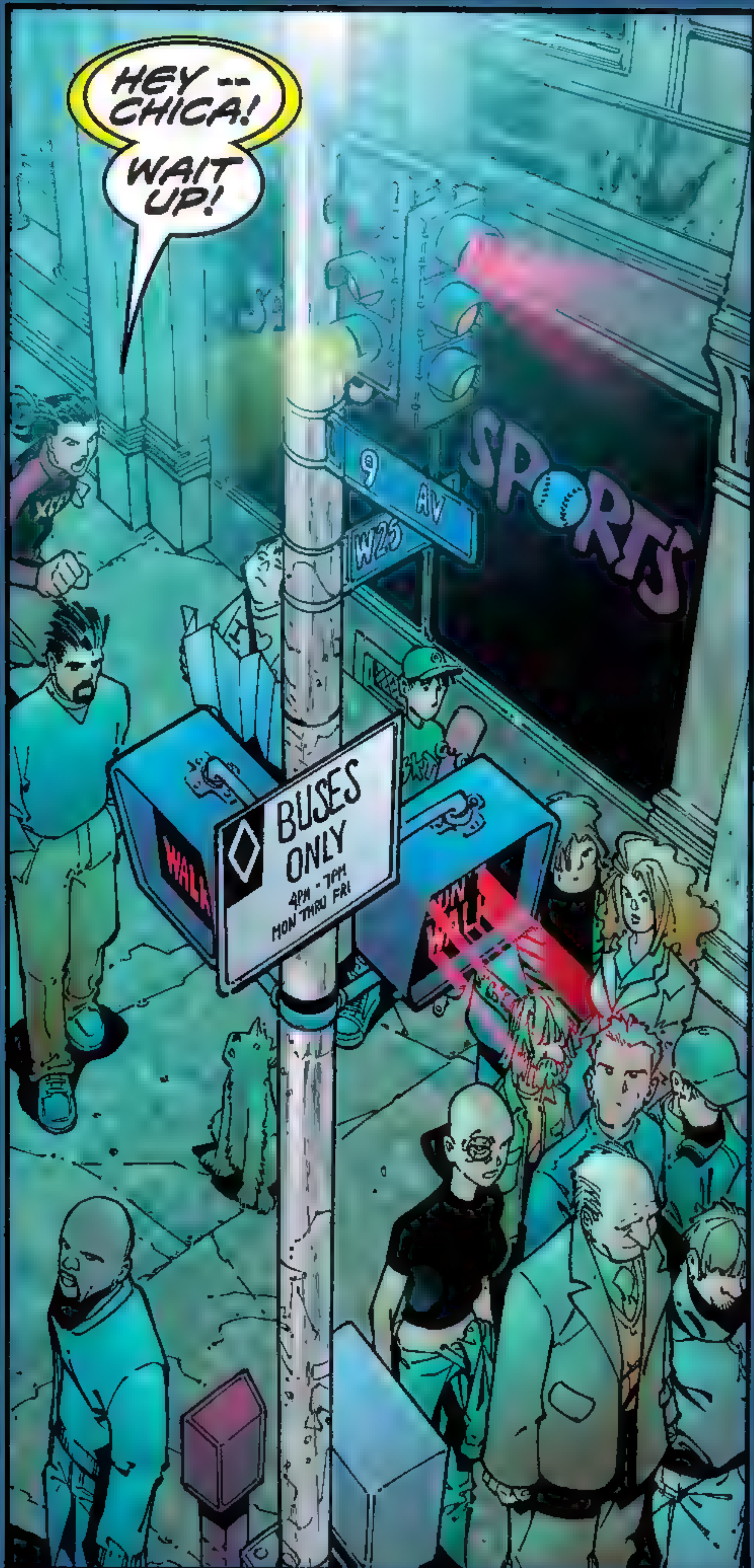
...I HOPE YOU'RE
NOT GOING TO
TAKE ADVANTAGE
OF HIM... AND
LEAVE HIM FLAT
LIKE ALL THE
OTHERS...?

SAY...
WHAT'S THAT
TATTOO
SUPPOSED TO --
UH, MISS...?
MISS?!

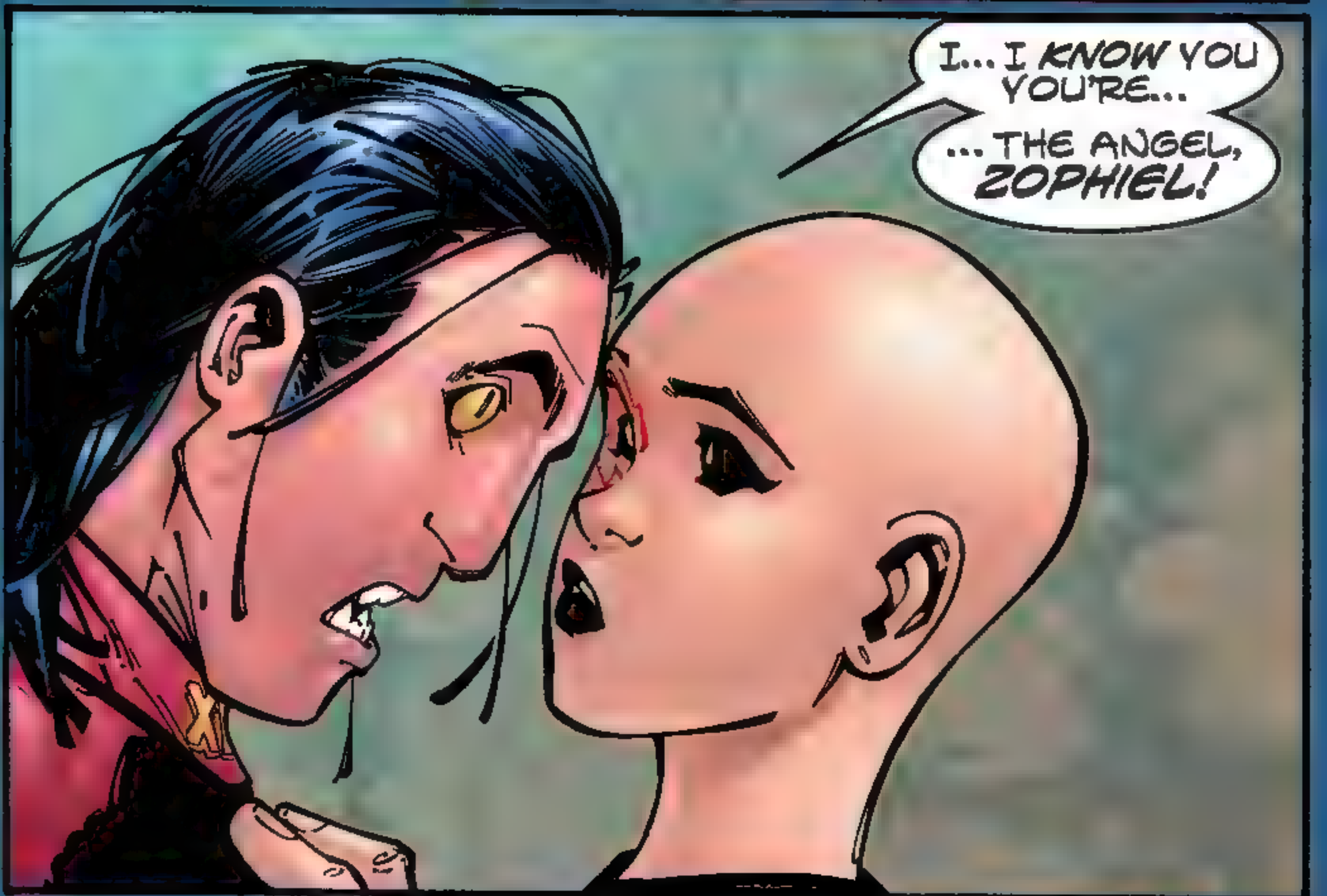
IS SHE
DEAF --?



HEY... I KNOW HER
AIN'T IT? WHO
IS SHE --?



HEY --
CHICA!
WAIT
UP!



I... I KNOW YOU
YOU'RE...
... THE ANGEL,
ZOPHIEL!



REMEMBER ME...? MY
COMPANERO, ALEX AN' ME
HELPED YOU LAST
MONTH --?

SHE'S
IGGIN' ME?
MAAAN,
THAT'S
COLD...

COLDER.

MAINE.



ALL THESE YEARS, YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO DRIVE IN THIS SLOP -- AN' IT'S *OUR* FAULT?!

TIME
FOR A
FUEL
BREAK --
GLK-GLK-
GLK...

YOU GOT
US **STUCK**
DEEP, IDIOT!
WE BETTER DO
SOMETHING
'AFORE WE
FREEZE.

WE CAN WALK IT -- AFTER WE GET WARMED UP SOME.
YOU START A FIRE, TOBY. ROSCOE'LL GET US
A RABBIT F'R DINNER...

WATCH FR
WENDIGO,
ROS...!

I WAGER
THAT ALEX
IS GOOD AND
WARM RIGHT
NOW...

... BUT WHY
DO I CARE?
WHY CAN'T I
GET THE BOY
OUT OF MY
MIND?

AND WHY
DID HE CALL
ME JULIE THE
LAST TIME I
SAW HIM?

THAT
NOISE --?!

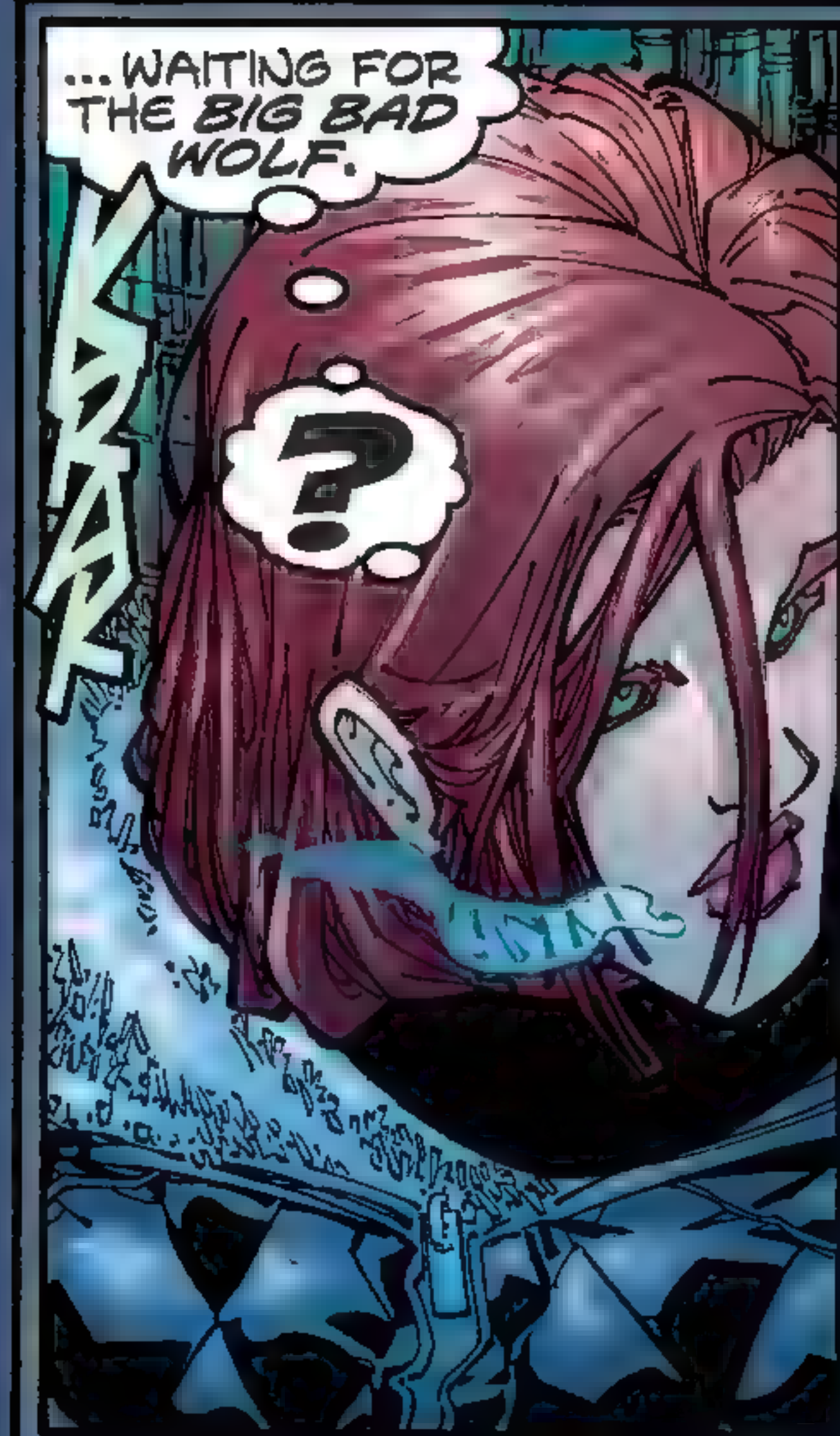
IT IS THOSE
CRETINS FROM
THE STORE -- WHY
THE HELL DID THEY
FOLLOW ME OUT
HERE...?

FOR THAT MATTER,
WHY THE HELL AM
I OUT HERE?
THIS QUEST IS
INSANE...

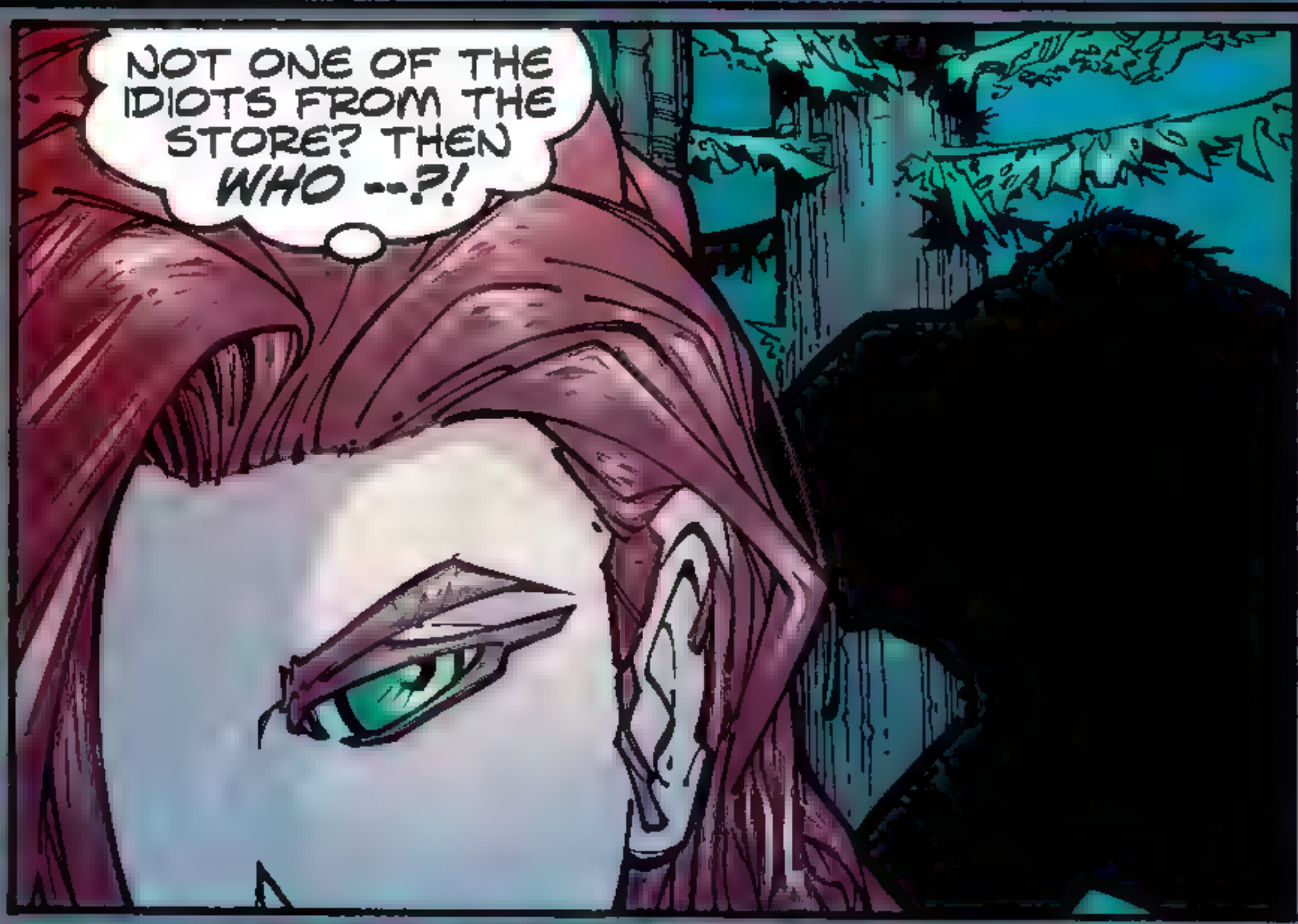
I HAVE
TURNED MY
BACK ON THE
ORDER OF THE
RED HOOD --
AND ALL THOSE
I'VE LOVED...

... TO
CHASE A
LEGEND
INTO THE
WOODS?

I AM
LIVING THE
FAIRY TALE
THAT GAVE THE
RED HOODS
THEIR NAME...



...WAITING FOR THE BIG BAD WOLF.



NOT ONE OF THE IDIOTS FROM THE STORE? THEN WHO --?!

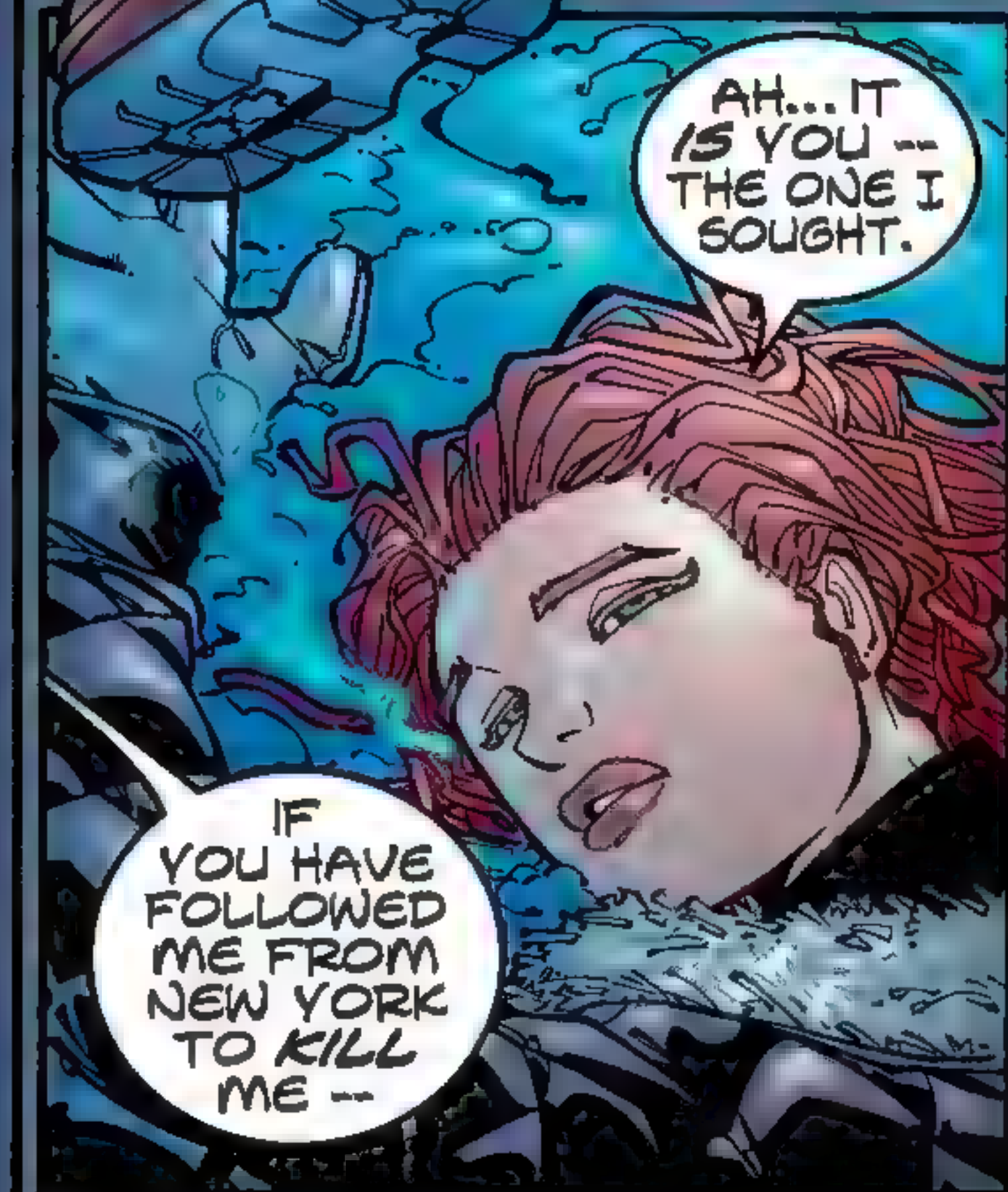


WHOEVER YOU ARE, YOU WILL NOT FIND ME EASY PREY!



EASIER THAN YOU THINK, ALAS.

WHOK



AH... IT IS YOU -- THE ONE I SOUGHT.

IF YOU HAVE FOLLOWED ME FROM NEW YORK TO KILL ME --



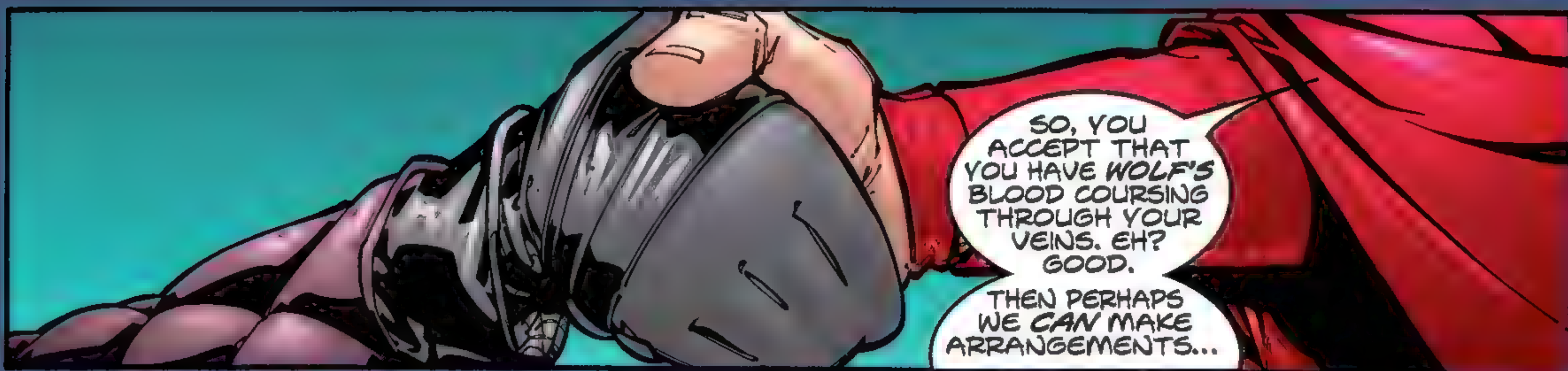
-- YOU HAVE FAILED.

I DID NOT COME TO KILL YOU --
-- I WANT TO LEARN FROM YOU...



INDEED...? AND WHAT IS IT YOU EXPECT ME TO TEACH?

THE TRUTH, MAESE -- THE TRUTH ABOUT MY BLOOD...



SO, YOU
ACCEPT THAT
YOU HAVE WOLF'S
BLOOD COURSEING
THROUGH YOUR
VEINS. EH?
GOOD.

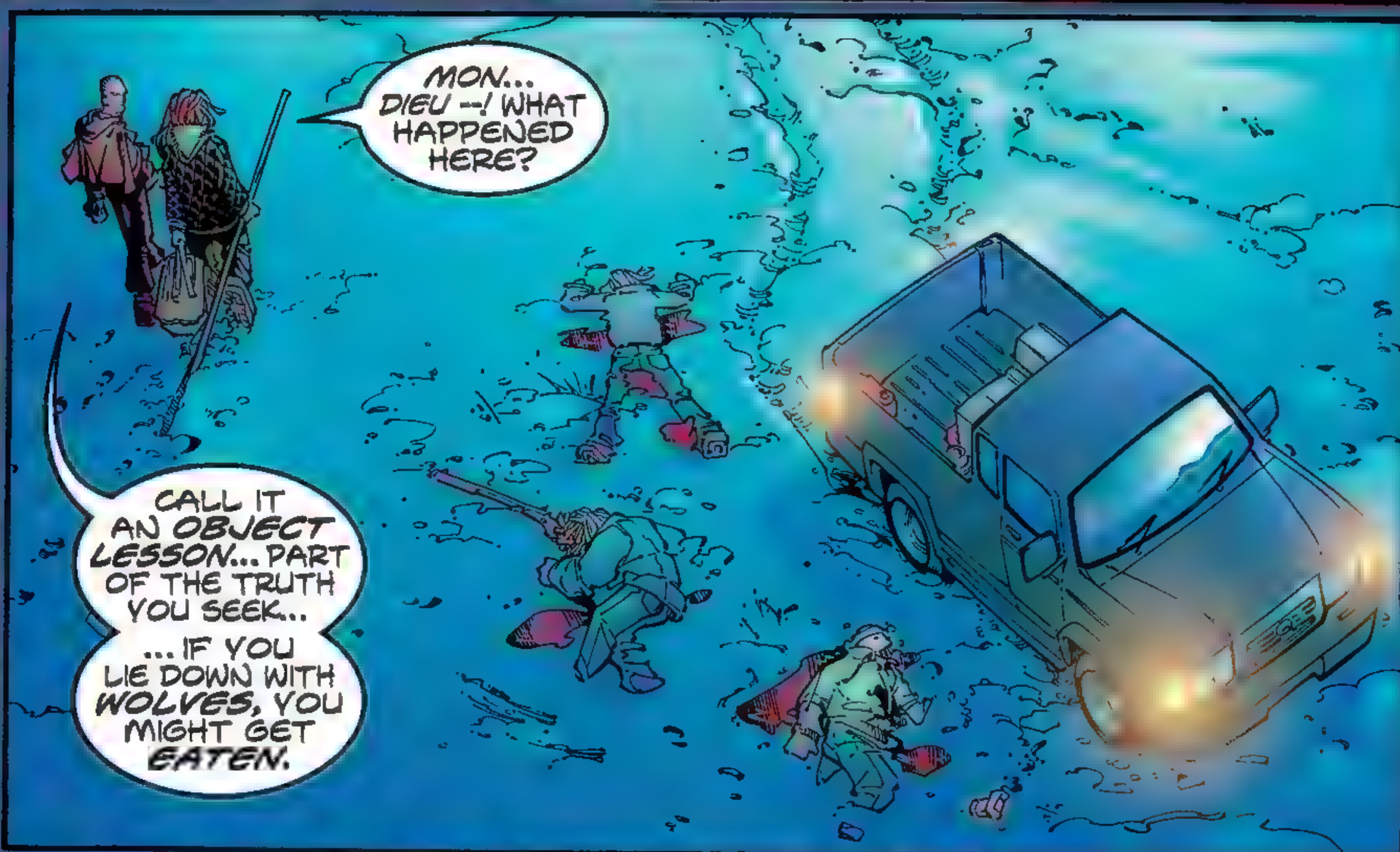
THEN PERHAPS
WE CAN MAKE
ARRANGEMENTS...



SNRR
ROWLL
AEEEE

WH-
WHAT IS
THAT?

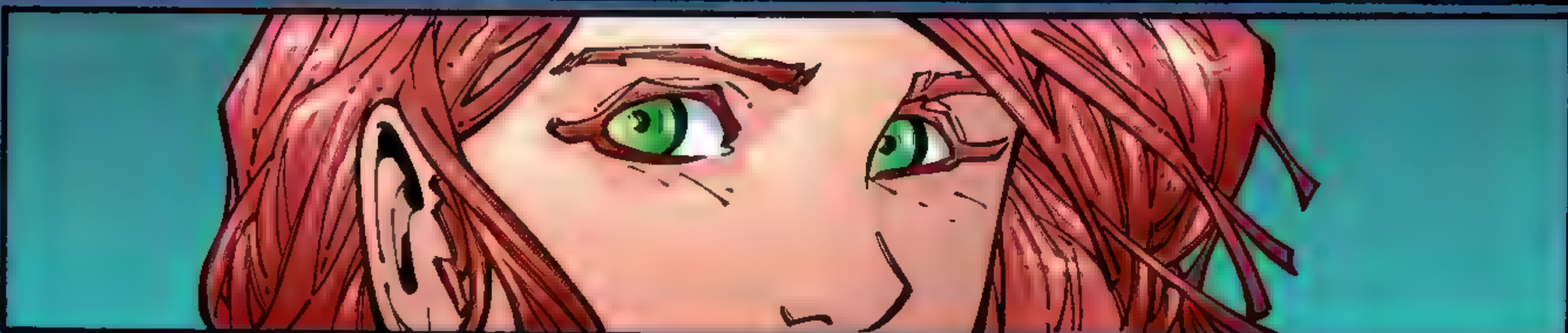
YOUR...
BROTHERS.



MON...
DIEU --! WHAT
HAPPENED
HERE?

CALL IT
AN OBJECT
LESSON... PART
OF THE TRUTH
YOU SEEK...

... IF YOU
LIE DOWN WITH
WOLVES, YOU
MIGHT GET
EATEN.



NEW YORK, THE FORMER
"RAILROAD CARTAGE"
WAREHOUSE.

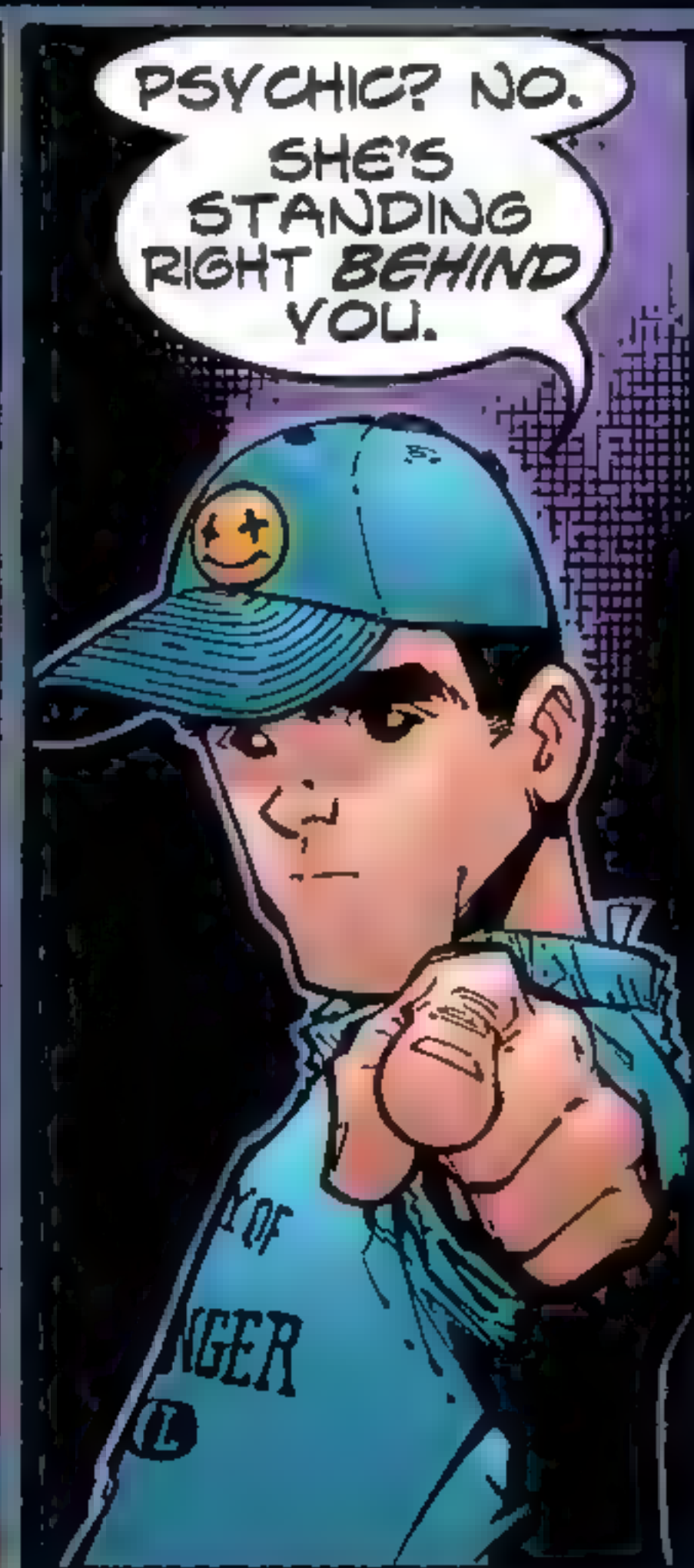
SO...
BOBO --
GUESS WHO
I RAN INTO
TODAY?

A... BALD
GIRL... WITH A WEIRD
TATTOO ON HER
FACE...?

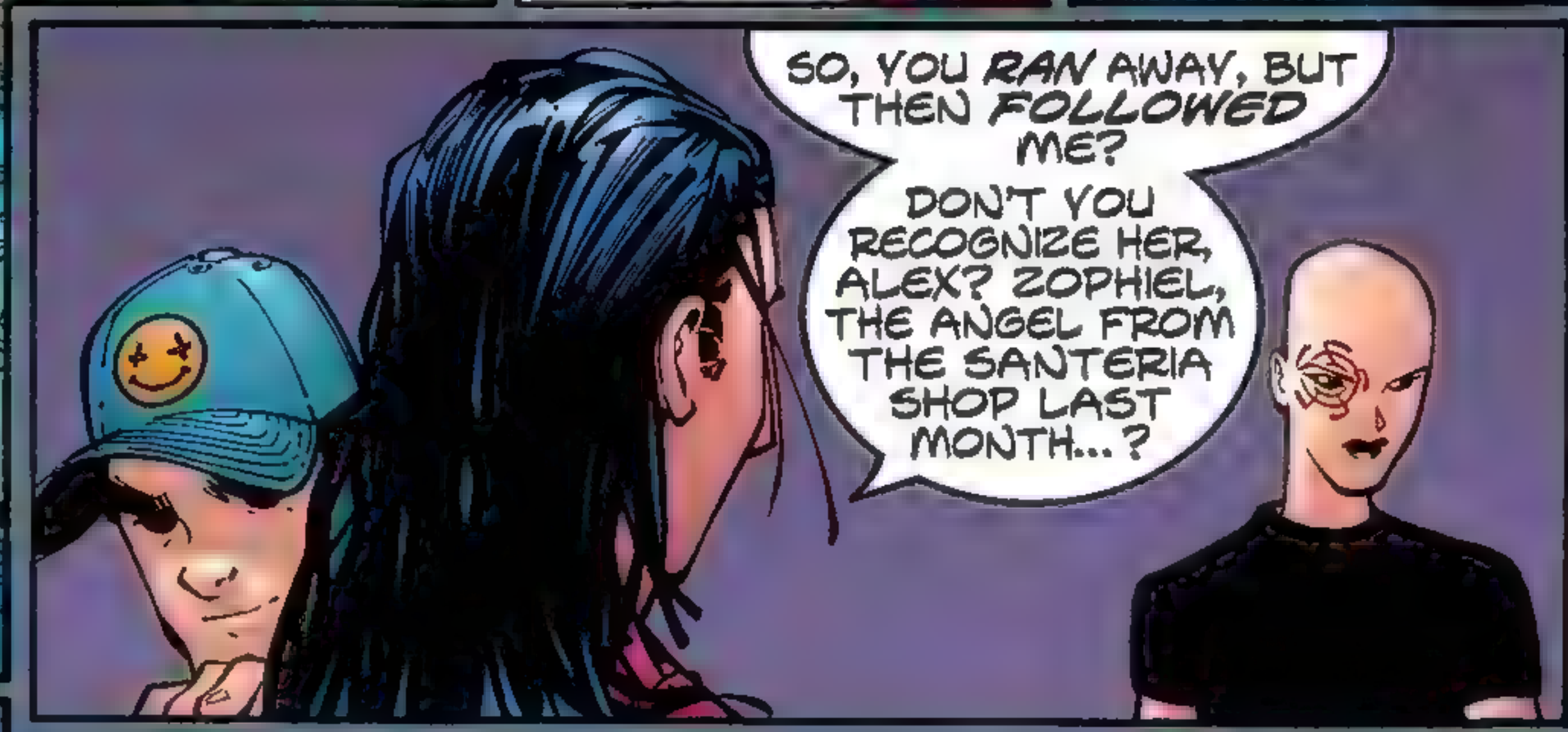


HOW'D
YOU --?!

YOU GOT
PHYSIC POWERS
NOW, TOO?



PSYCHIC? NO.
SHE'S
STANDING
RIGHT BEHIND
YOU.

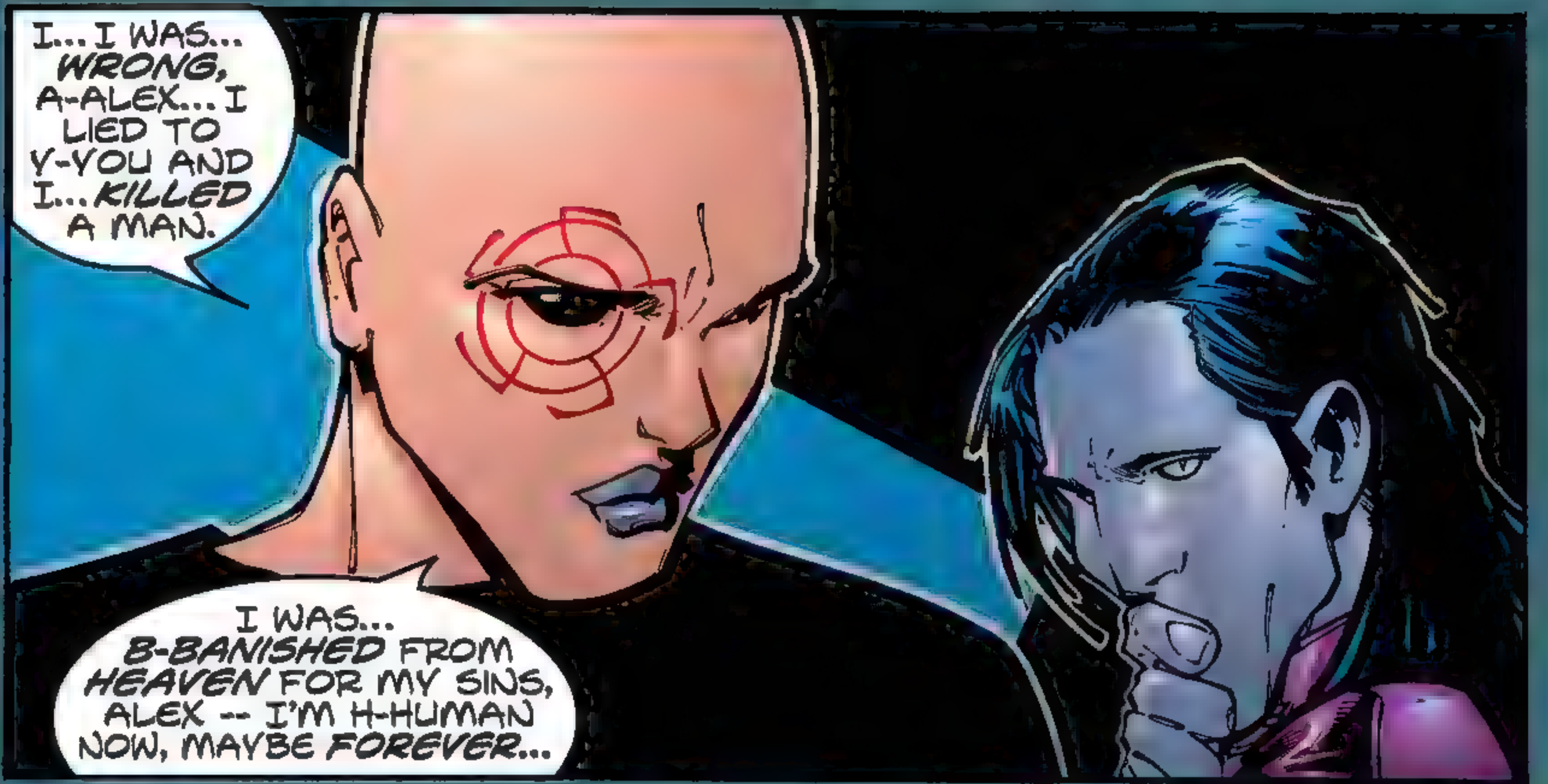


SO, YOU RAN AWAY, BUT
THEN FOLLOWED
ME?

DON'T YOU
RECOGNIZE HER,
ALEX? ZOPHEL,
THE ANGEL FROM
THE SANTERIA
SHOP LAST
MONTH...?

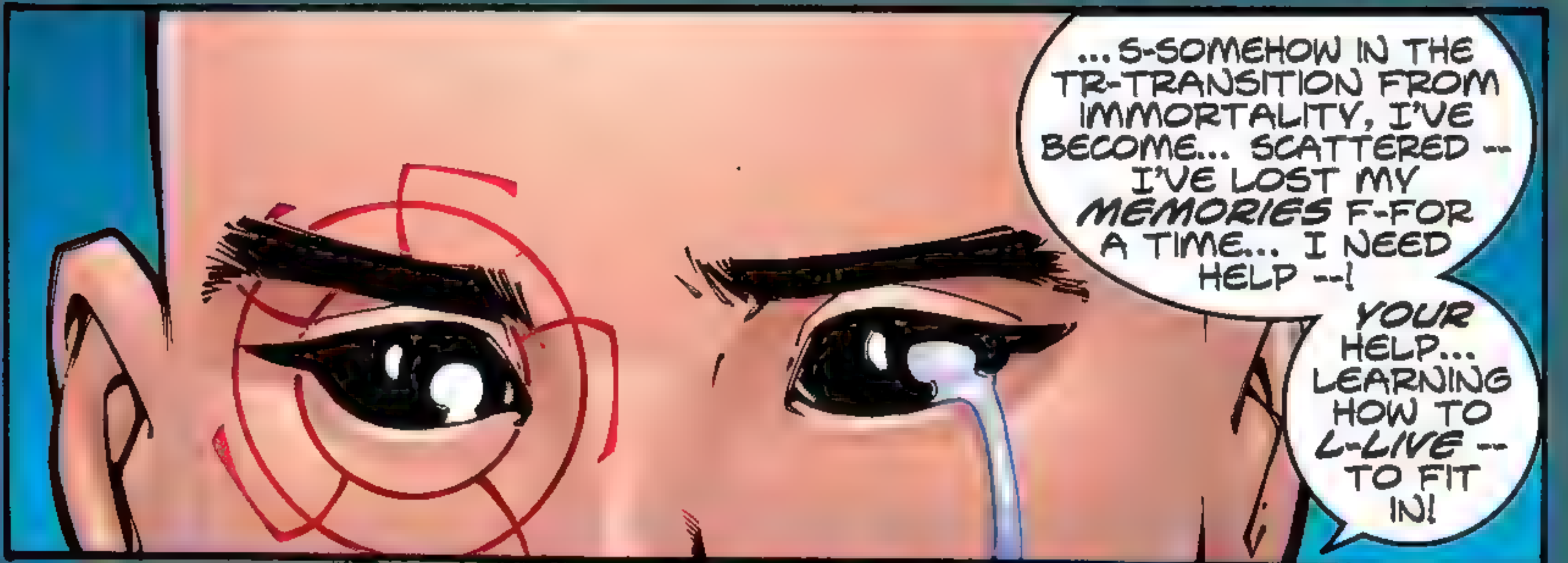


OH, I RECOGNIZE HER ALL RIGHT. I'VE BEEN TRYING, UNSUCCESSFULLY, TO BLOCK OUT OUR LAST MEETING.



I... I WAS... **WRONG**, A-ALEX... I LIED TO Y-YOU AND I... **KILLED** A MAN.

I WAS... **B-BANISHED** FROM HEAVEN FOR MY SINS, ALEX -- I'M H-HUMAN NOW, MAYBE FOREVER...



... S-SOMEHOW IN THE TR-TRANSITION FROM IMMORTALITY, I'VE BECOME... SCATTERED -- I'VE LOST MY **MEMORIES** F-FOR A TIME... I NEED HELP --!

YOUR HELP... LEARNING HOW TO **L-LIVE** -- TO FIT IN!



PERHAPS YOU MISSED THE FACT THAT WE **VAMPIRES** AREN'T EXACTLY **MAINSTREAM**. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO FIT IN **MYSELF**...

... AND I CAN'T THINK OF A REASON TO HELP YOU DO IT...

THEN WH-WHAT KIND OF **CHOSEN** ONE ARE YOU --?



ANOTHER PLACE...

... LOST MY JOB... CAN'T BELIEVE EMMA DID THAT.

'COURSE, I WAS AWFUL DISTRACTED THINKING ABOUT MY... **HOUSE GUEST**. MAYBE EMM'S JEALOUS... ?



WHERE YOU BEEN --? THAT BALD COUSIN OF YOURS HAS RUN-OFF WITH SOME SORT OF **FREAKY** INDIAN-HIPPIE OR SOMETHING.

WHA --?



THANKS, MIZZ BISSETTE... 'BYE!



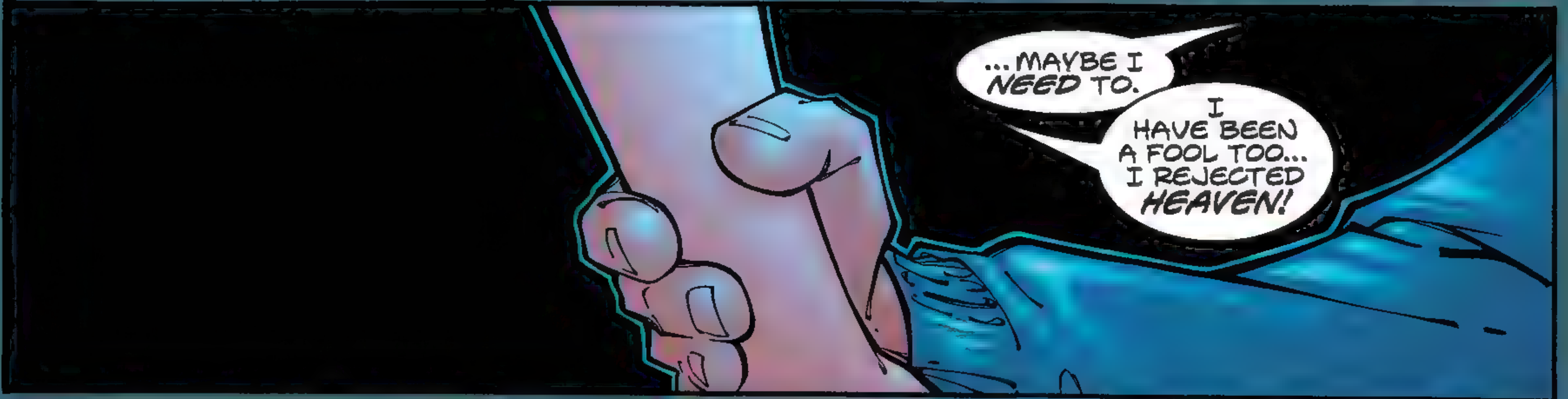
HMMPF. THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE GET INVOLVED WITH **CULTS**.

I KNEW THAT TATTOO WAS A BAD SIGN...



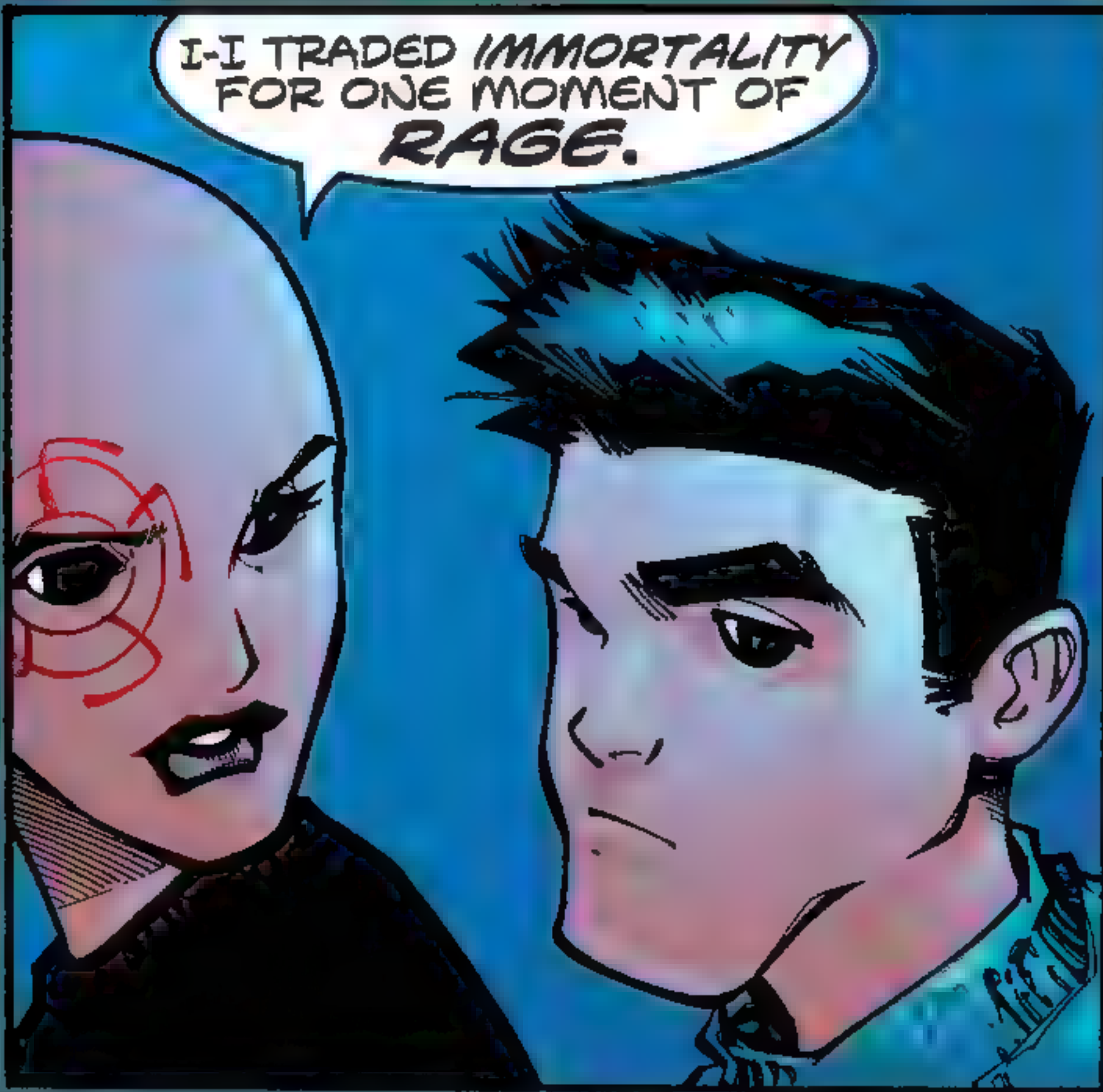
ZOPHIEL --
WAIT!
I DON'T KNOW
WHAT I'M **CHOSEN**
FOR, BUT I DO KNOW
THAT I'VE CHOSEN
TO HELP PEOPLE...
PEOPLE LIKE
US.

I'VE BEEN
A FOOL...
I'M SORRY. I
WANT TO
HELP YOU...



...MAYBE I
NEED TO.

I
HAVE BEEN
A FOOL TOO...
I REJECTED
HEAVEN!



I-I TRADED **IMMORTALITY**
FOR ONE MOMENT OF
RAGE.



SO... YOU'VE
GOT **ANGER**
ISSUES.
WE HAVE
SOMETHING IN
COMMON.
SO, COME
ON... WE'LL GET
YOU SET UP AT THE
WAREHOUSE...



...MAYBE SEE ABOUT GETTING
YOU A **JOB...** OR SOME-
THING...?

IS THERE
ANYBODY
YOU NEED TO
CALL...

...LET
'EM KNOW
WHERE
YOU'LL
BE...?

TH-
THERE
IS A... NO,
NEVER
MIND --



"-- HE WILL BE BETTER
OFF WITHOUT ME. I
WOULD JUST DRAG HIM
INTO WEIRDNESS..."

WHERE COULD SHE
HAVE GONE --? WHY
DIDN'T I TAKE THE
TIME TO LEARN
ANYTHING ABOUT
HER...?

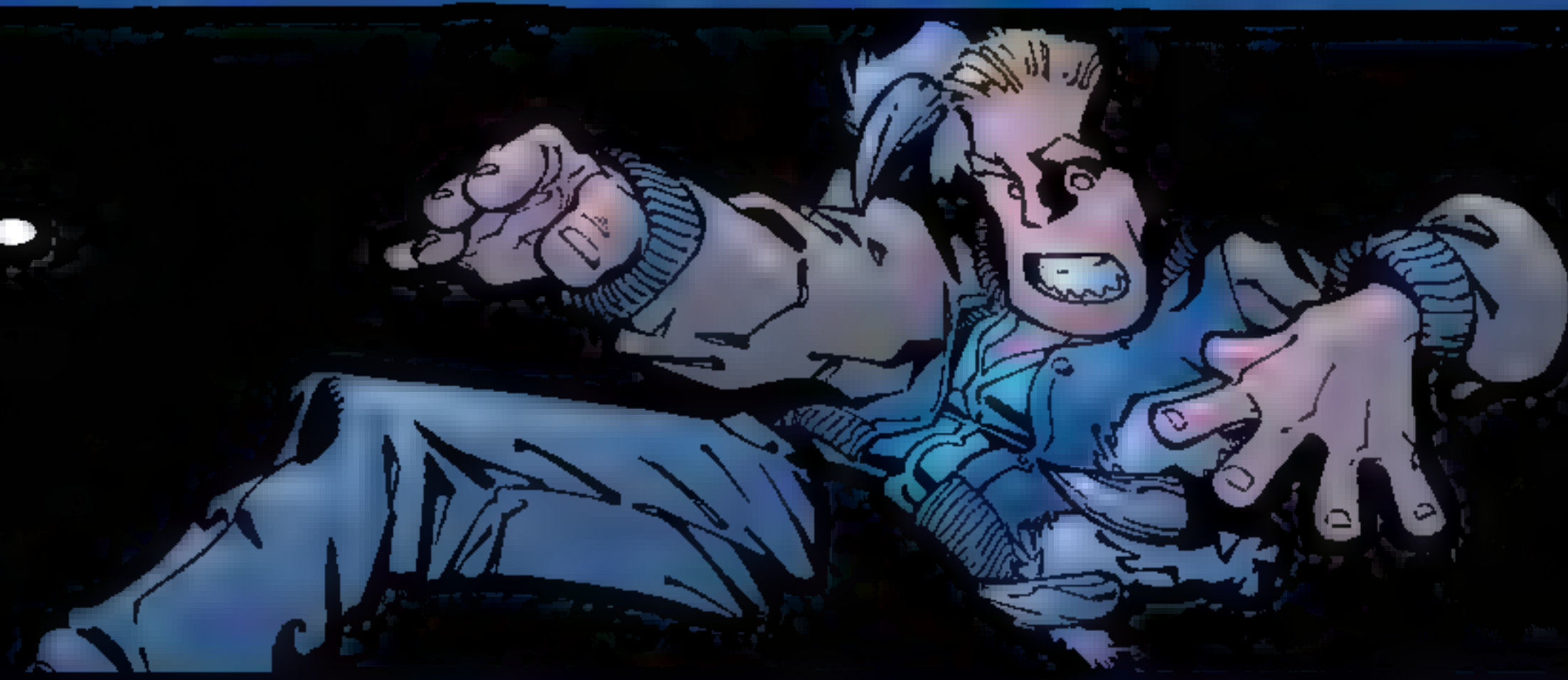
HECK, I
DON'T EVEN
KNOW HER
NAME!



WELL, THIS IS
THE ALLEY WHERE
I FOUND HER
BEFORE... WONDER
IF SHE CAME
BACK... I...

...NUTS, I'M
BEING SUCH A
DOOFUS -- EMMA'S
RIGHT, LETTING
THESE THINGS
BECOME
PERSONAL...

... ALWAYS
GETS ME IN
TROUBLE --
HEY -- ?!



NOOOOOOOOO

"... NO ONE'S DOING BUT *MINE*.
I ALONE AM RESPONSIBLE FOR
ALL OF THIS. BEGINNING SOON
WE TWO MUST JOIN AGAIN TO
END IT."

THOUGH HUMANKIND KNOWS NOTHING
OF IT, WE HAVE BIRTHED A NIGHTMARE
THAT NOW THREATENS TO CONSUME
THE EARTH. WE MUST NOT SUFFER
THAT TO OCCUR.

I AM SICK
TO THE CORE OF
MY BEING -- MUST
I DON AGAIN THE
ARMOR I WORE IN
THE WAR *AGAINST*
HEAVEN SO LONG
AGO?

IF
THERE IS NO
OTHER WAY TO
UNDO WHAT I
HAVE WROUGHT...
THEN SO
BE IT!

IT IS SAID
THAT THESE
CREATURES CAN
ONLY BE PUT TO
REST IN THE
EARTH OF THEIR
ORIGIN...

... THUS SHALL THIS -- THE SOIL
OF *PARADISE* ITSELF -- SERVE
ME WELL AGAINST ANY
FOE.

THE
TIME RAPIDLY
APPROACHES
WHEN ALL THE
KINGDOMS OF
HEAVEN WILL BE
ROCKED BY COSMIC
CONFLICT ONCE
AGAIN...

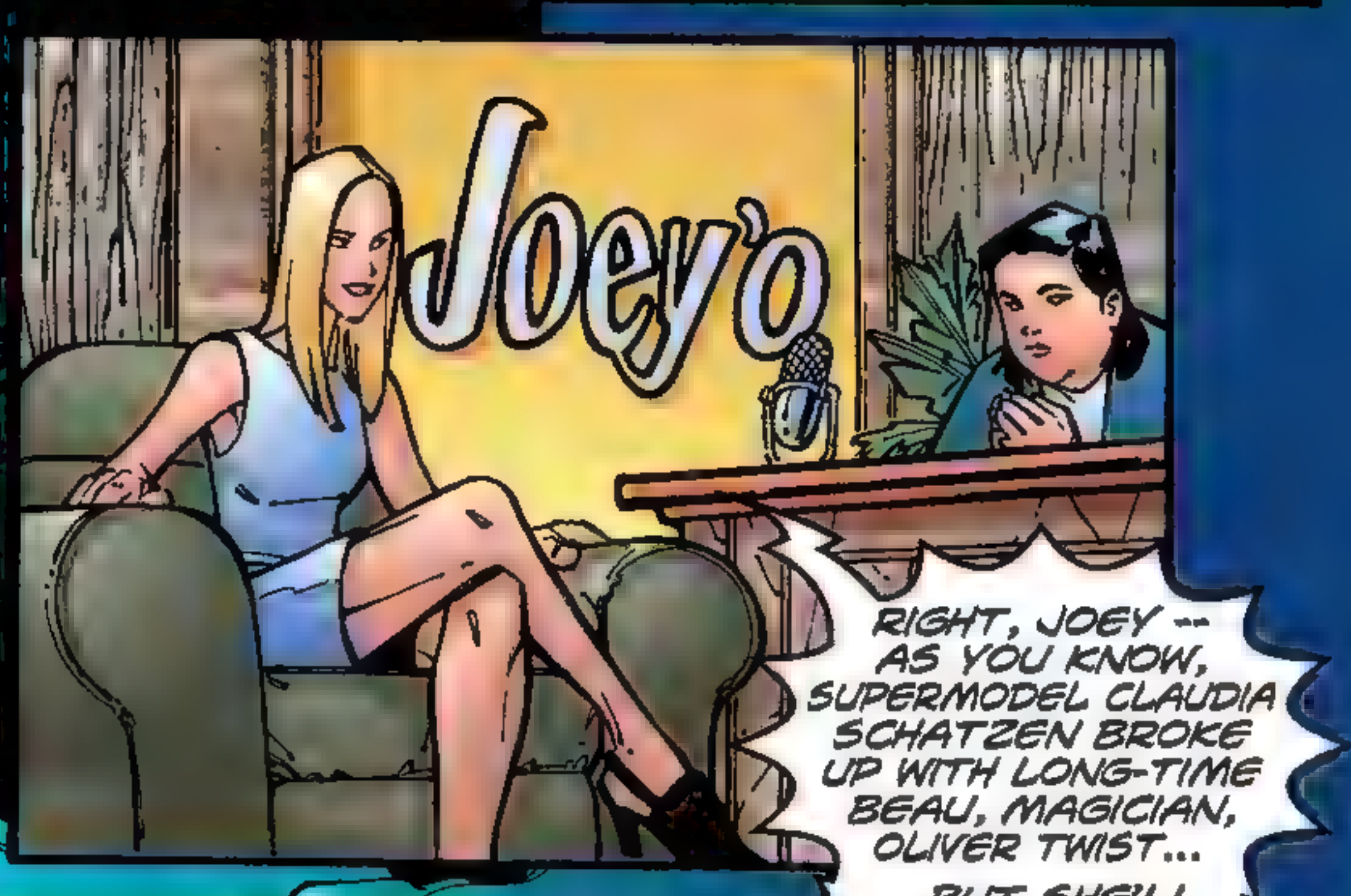
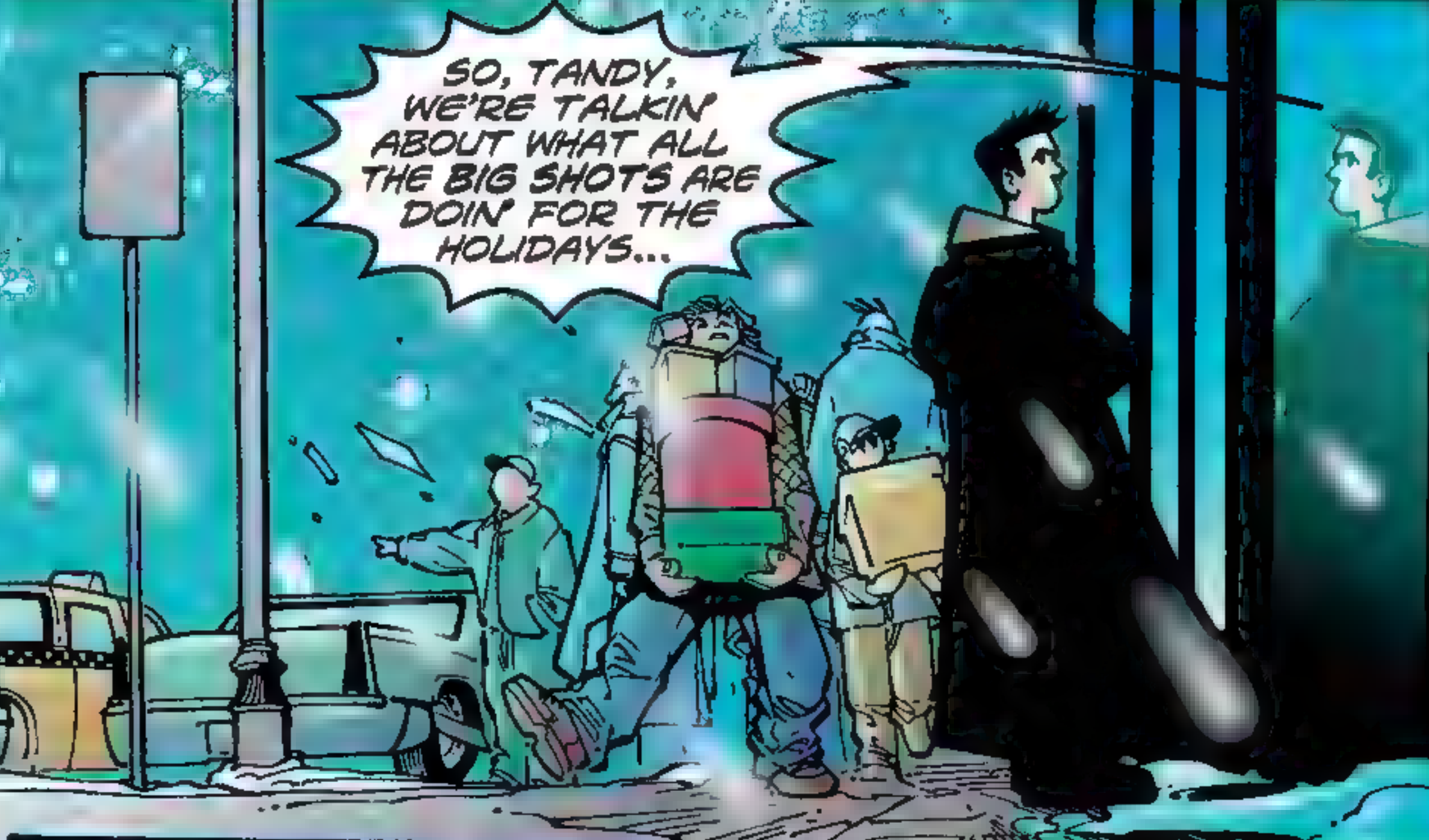
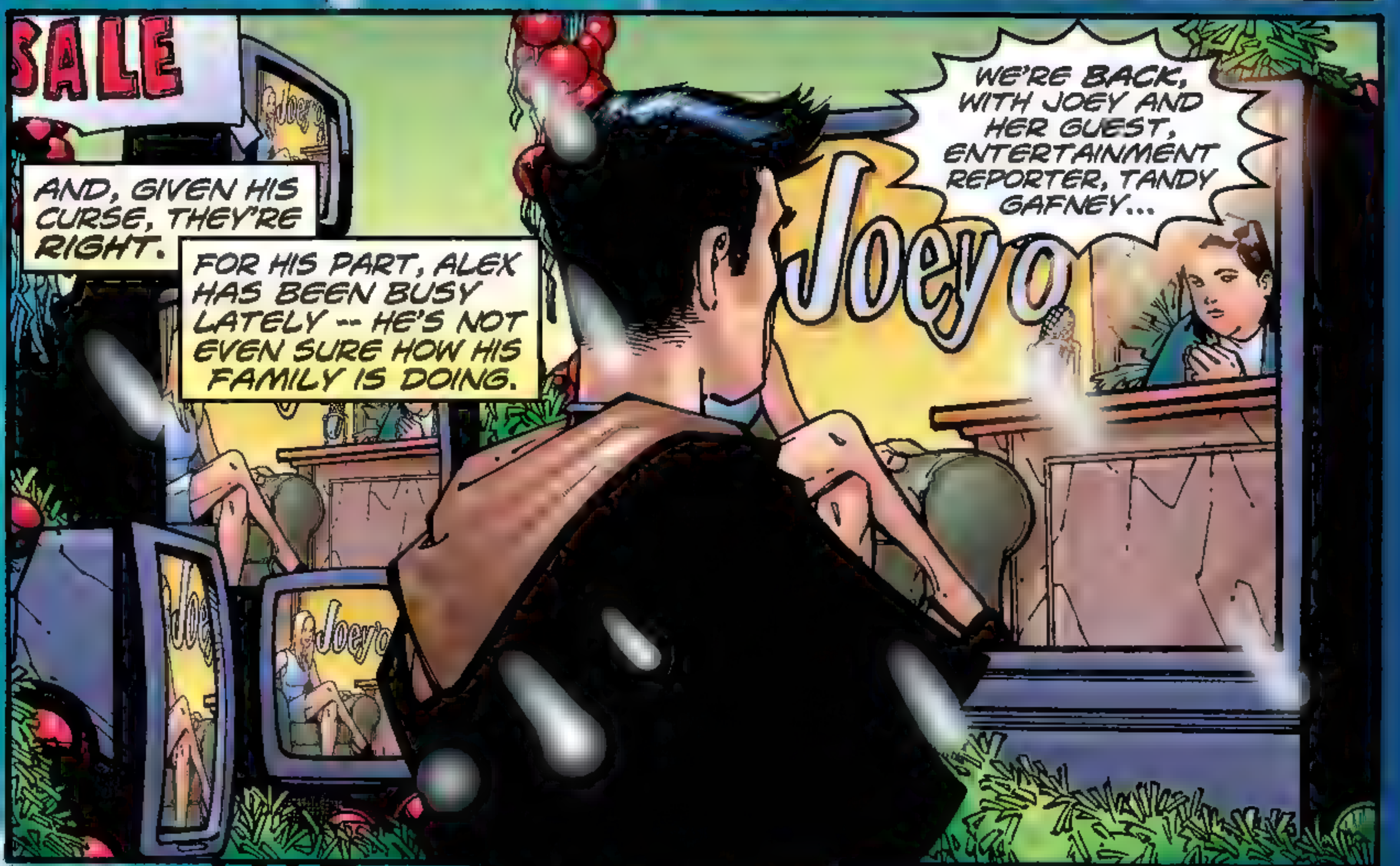
... AND I
MUST BE
ON THE RIGHT
SIDE THIS
TIME!





CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CHRISTMAS PASSED





VAN FLEET GIVES NEW MEANING TO THE TERM "BLOODSUCKING POLITICIAN." HE'S A VAMPIRE, TOO -- ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL ON EARTH. BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT DRAWS ALEX'S ATTENTION...



THE VAN FLEET PARTY WILL BE IN HONOR OF THE SENATOR'S HEROIC AIDE, BILL ELDER...

...WHO'LL BE MAKING HIS FIRST PUBLIC APPEARANCE SINCE SURVIVING THE TERRORIST ATTACK ON THE SENATOR'S NEW YORK OFFICE EARLIER THIS YEAR.



DAD.



WE'RE OUTTA TIME -- MERRY CHRISTMAS, GOD BLESS US ALL... EVERYONE!

YEAH... RIGHT.



MAYBE I SHOULD TRY TO BUY A GIFT FOR ZOPHIE...



...BUT WHAT DO YOU GET FOR A FALLEN ANGEL?

WEIRD --
TEENAGE
VAMPIRE AND AN
ANGEL BANISHED
FROM HEAVEN --
PARTNERS.

NOT LONG AGO
I WOULD'VE LAUGHED
AT ANYONE WHO SAID
THAT *EITHER* CREATURE
EXISTED -- NOW I'VE
SEEN ALMOST
EVERYTHING.

HMM...
OF AN
THE DI
ARCHA
ON T
L
C

*ALEX'S C
YULE U
CHRONIC
CRIMSON
- Jolly o'P

WOW
WE'RE
THE ANG
BU...

NOT LONG AGO
I WOULD'VE LAUGHED
AT ANYONE WHO SAID
THAT *EITHER* CREATURE
EXISTED -- NOW I'VE
SEEN ALMOST
EVERYTHING.

SINCE ZOPHIEL FELL TO EARTH, SHE'S NEEDED ME TO SHOW HER EVERY-THING --

-- SHE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT SHE HAD TO EAT AND SLEEP, NOW THAT SHE'S HUMAN.

-- SHE DIDN'T
EVEN KNOW THAT
SHE HAD TO EAT
AND SLEEP, NOW
THAT SHE'S
HUMAN.

HMMPH -- SPEAKING
OF ANGELS -- HERE'S
THE DINER WHERE THE
ARCHANGELS PUT ME
ON TRIAL FOR MY
LIFE LAST
CHRISTMAS
EVE. *

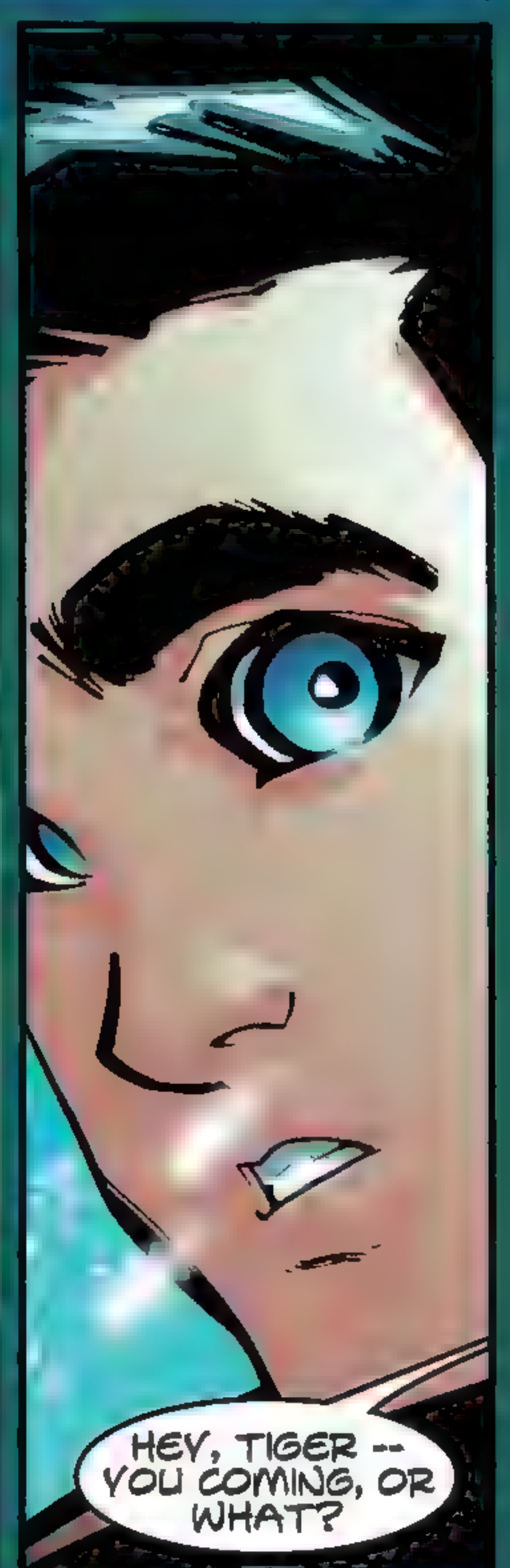
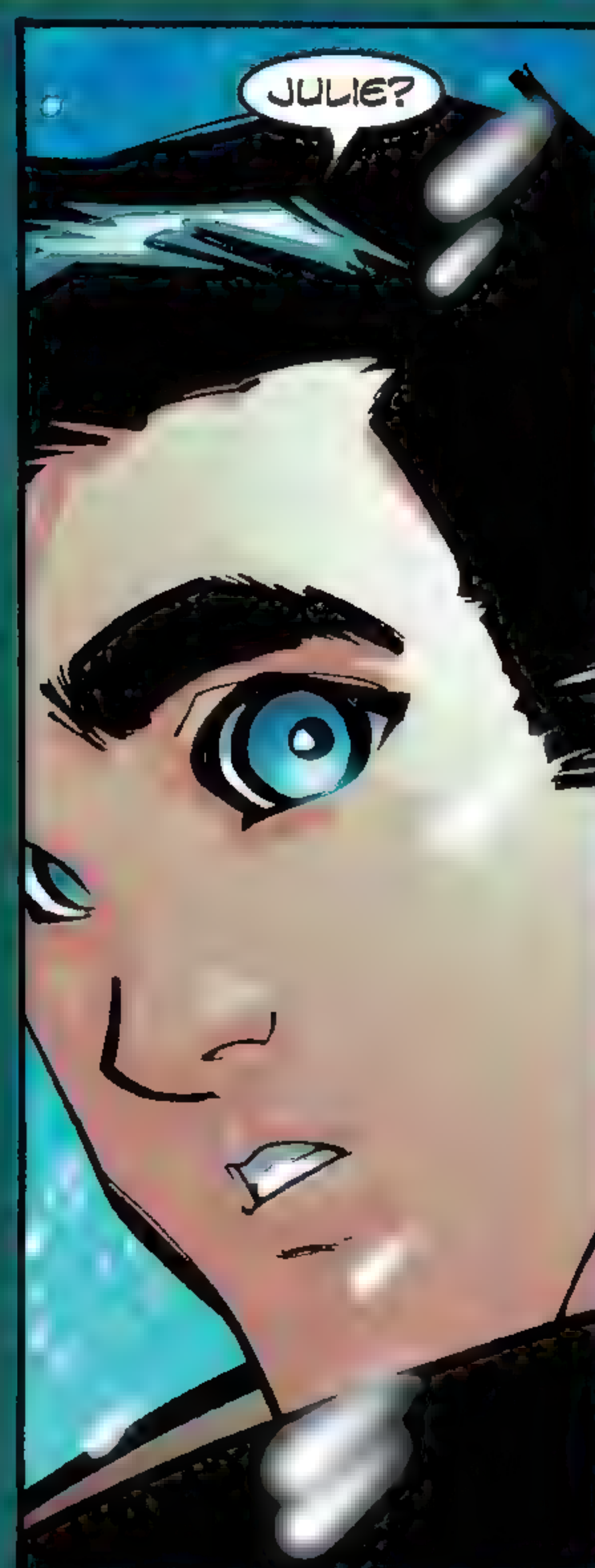
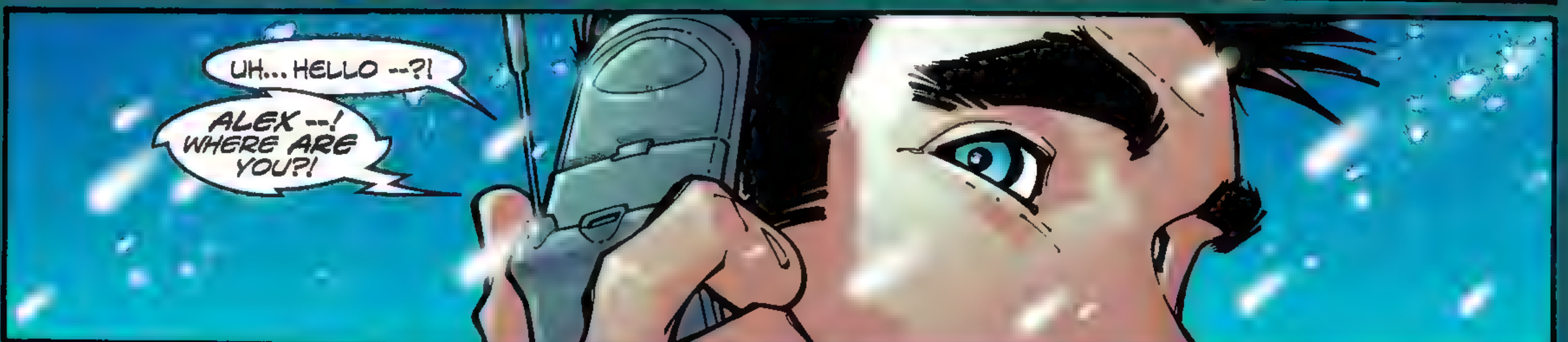
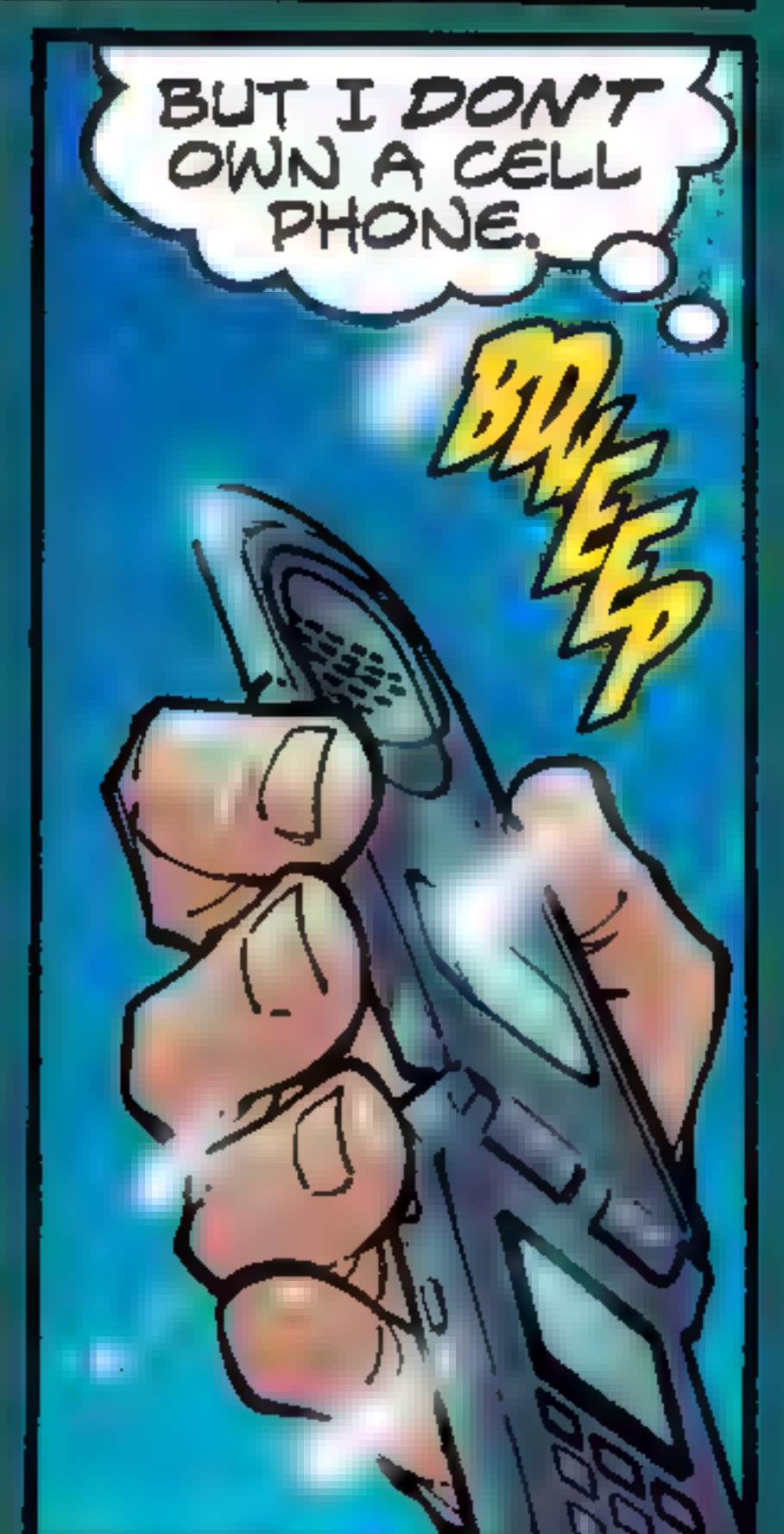
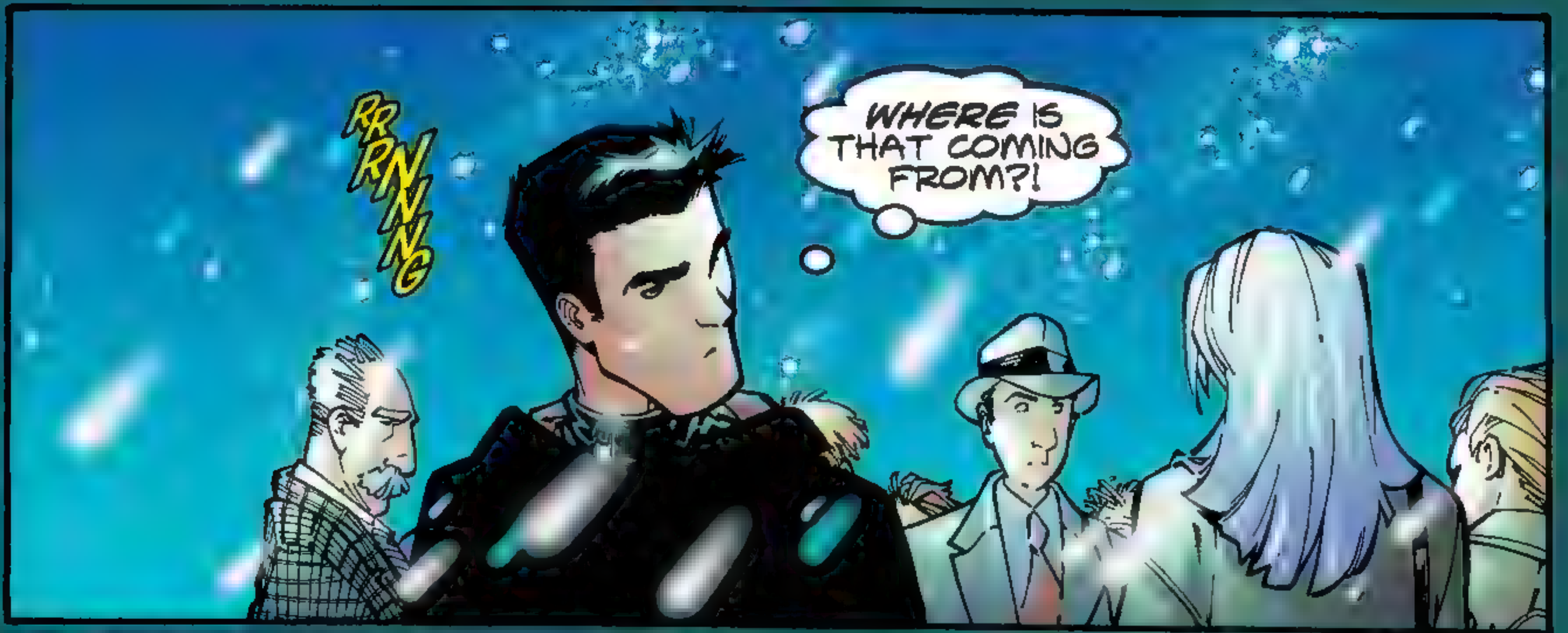
***ALEX'S CRUEL
YULE WAS
CHRONICLED IN
CRIMSON #7
- Jolly ol' Scott.**

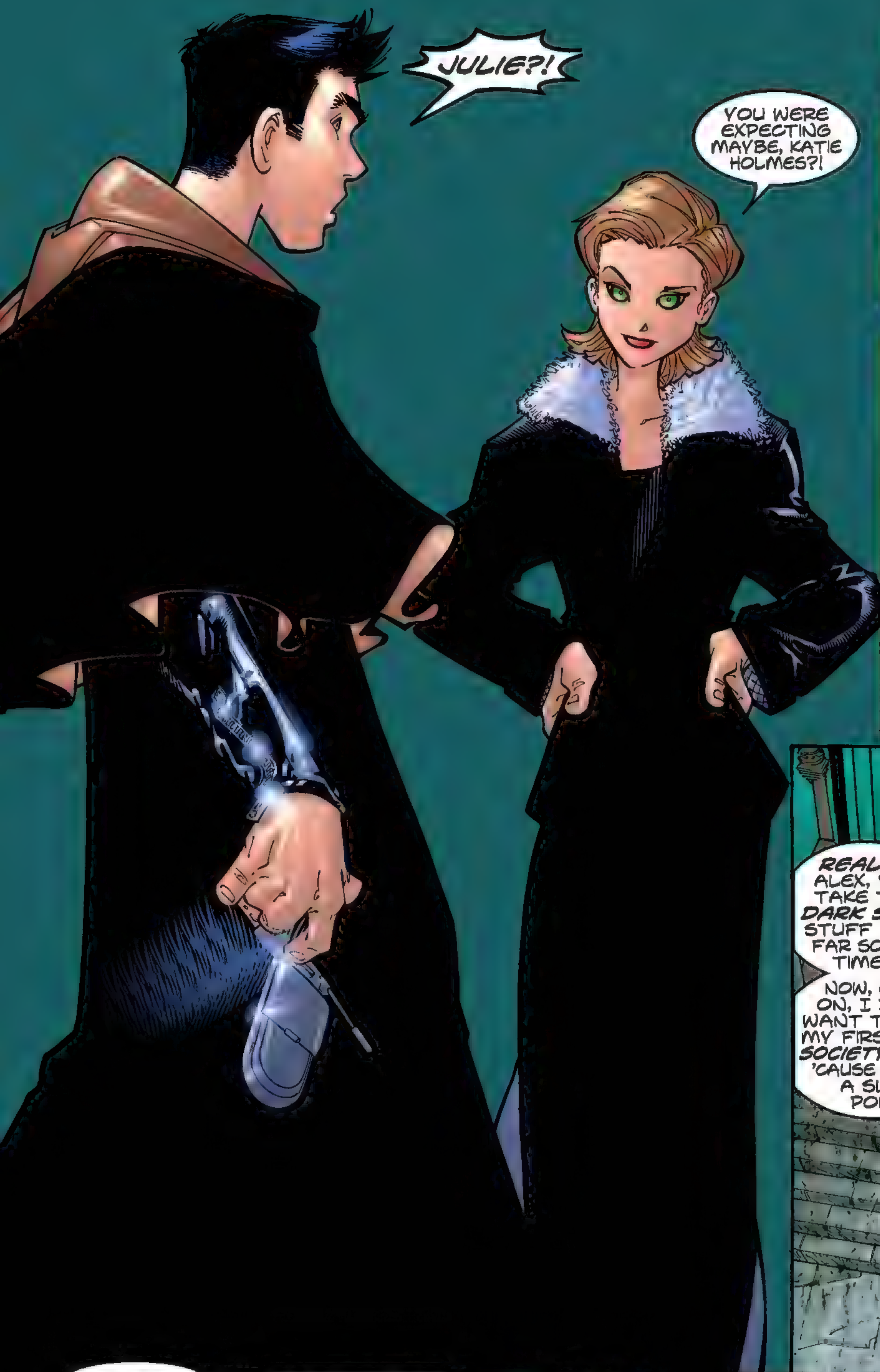
WOW -- THOSE FOLKS WERE KILLED FOR THEIR *SINS* BY THE ANGELS LAST YEAR -- BUT THEY'RE *ALIVE* AGAIN --?!

MAYBE THERE'S HOPE FOR *ALL* OF US, IF THAT MUCH *MERCY'S* AVAILABLE...

MAYBE THERE'S
HOPE FOR ALL
OF US, IF THAT
MUCH MERCY'S
AVAILABLE...

RR
RR
NN
NN
G





JULIE?!

YOU WERE EXPECTING MAYBE, KATIE HOLMES?!



B-BUT... YOU'RE... DEAD --?!



NOT EVEN FUNNY -- WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?



REALLY, ALEX, YOU TAKE THIS DARK SOUL STUFF TOO FAR SOME-TIMES.

NOW, COME ON, I DON'T WANT TO MISS MY FIRST HIGH SOCIETY PARTY, 'CAUSE YOU'RE A SLOW POKE!



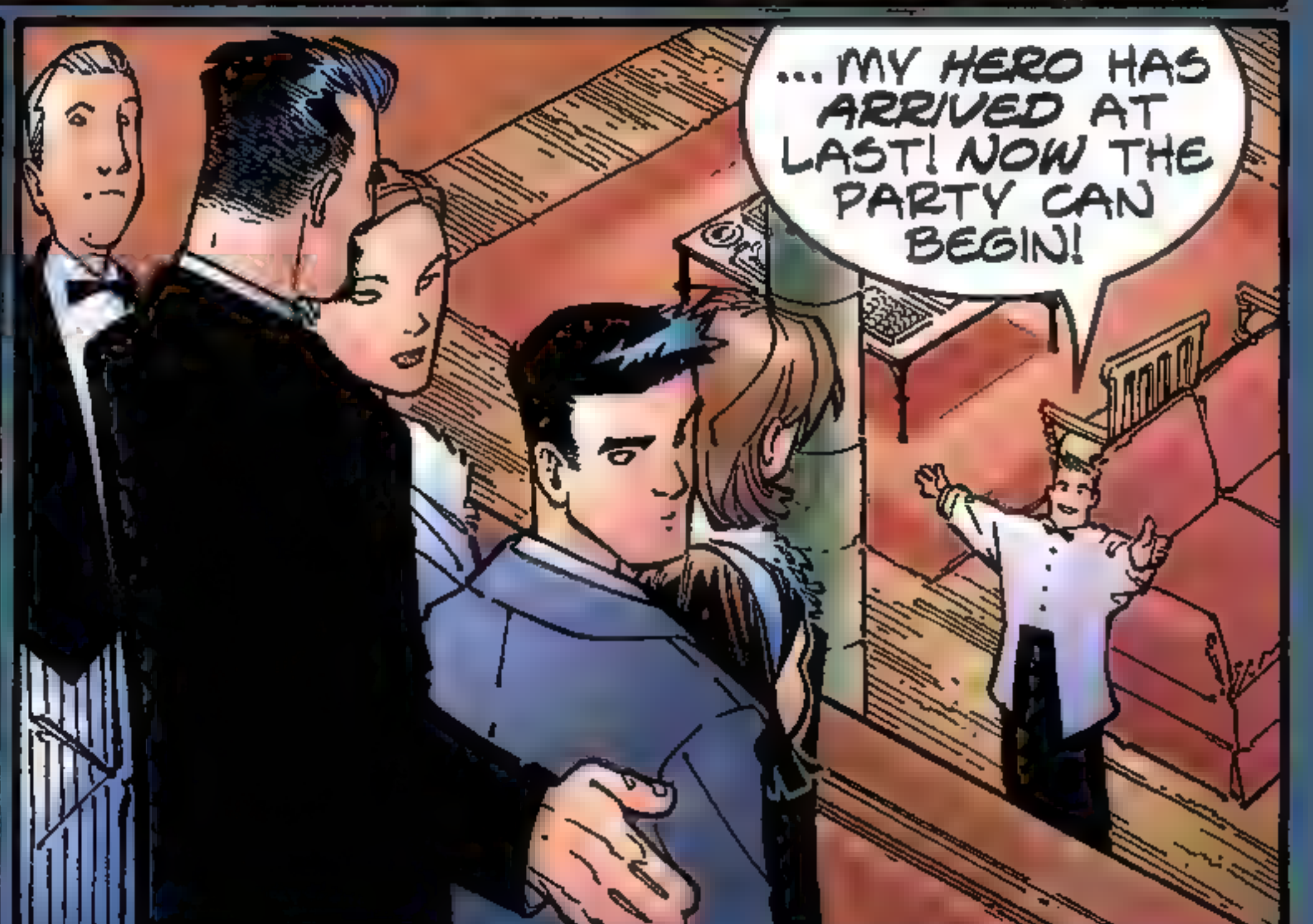
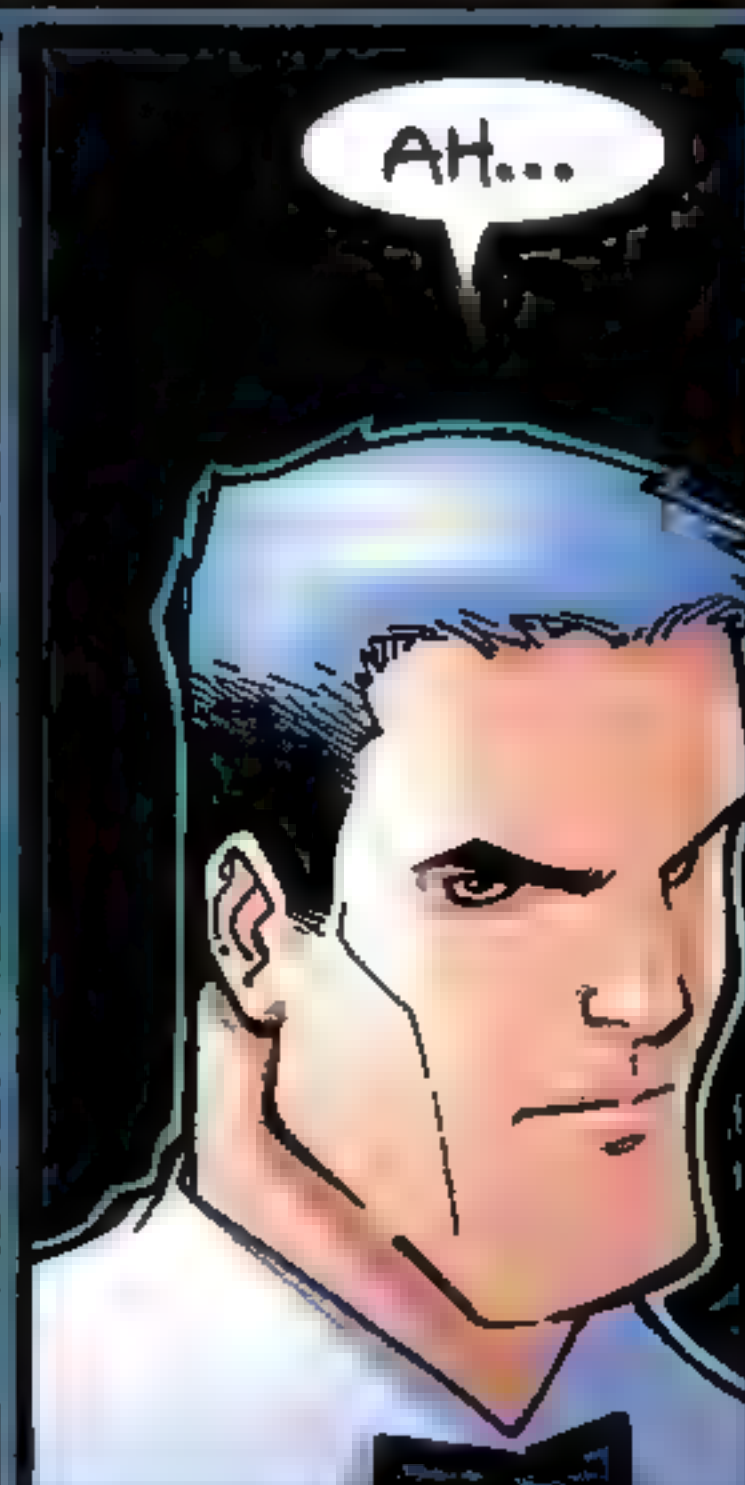
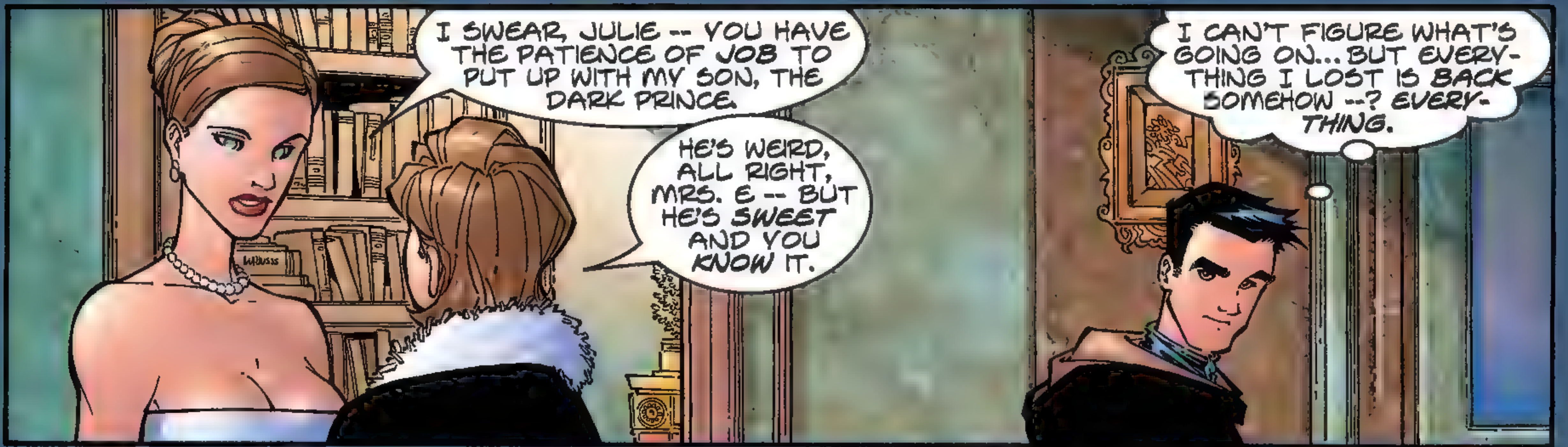
PARTY --?

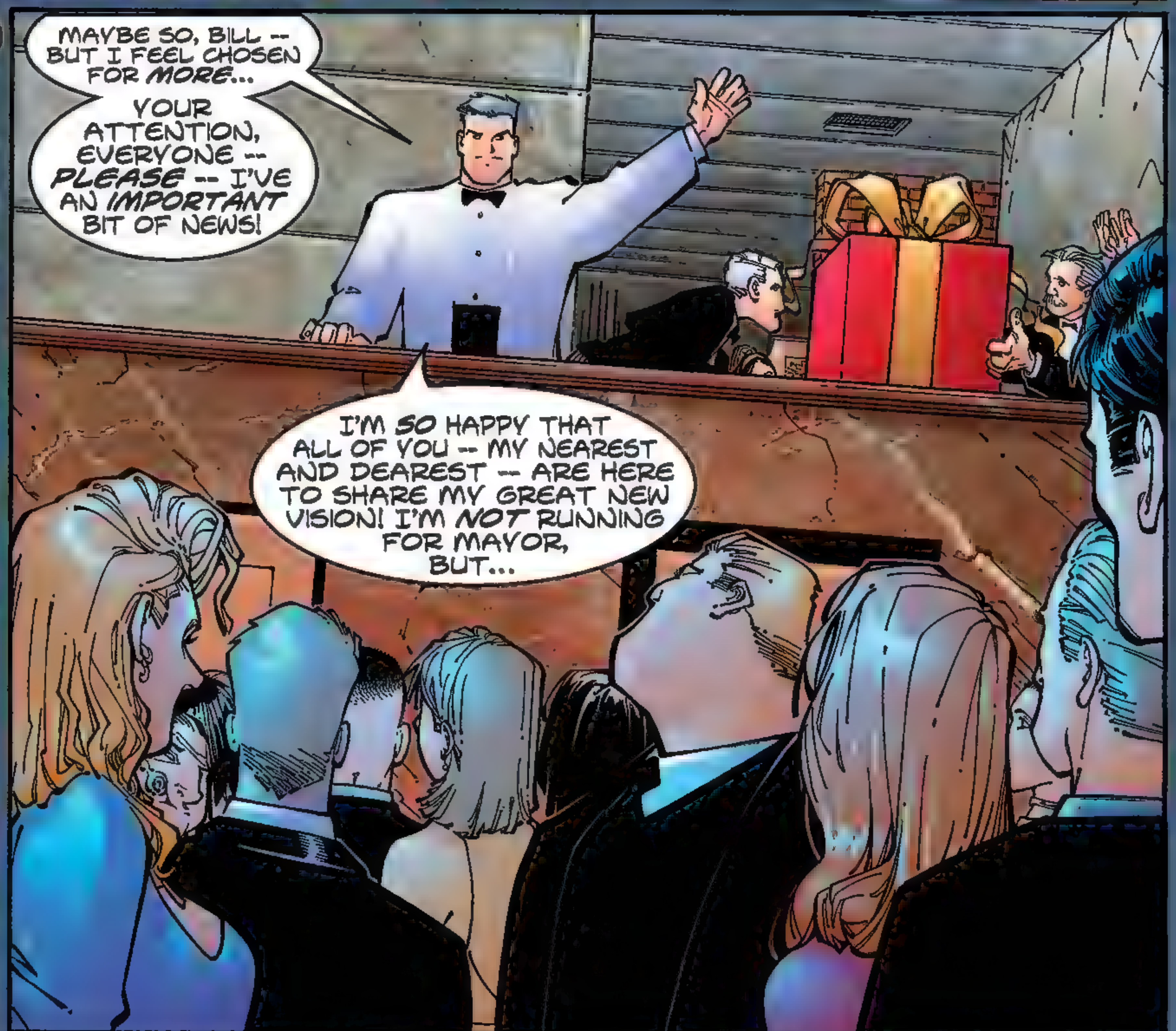
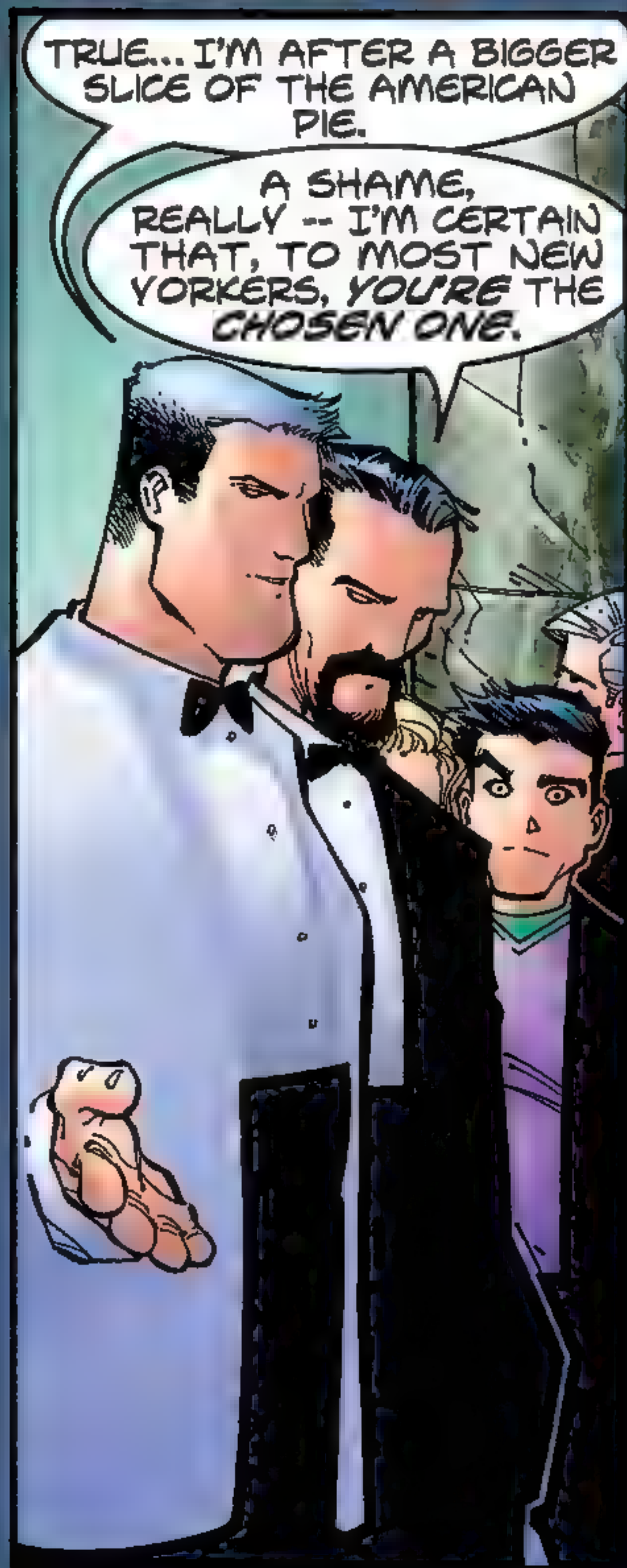
EARTH TO ALEX -- THE SENATOR'S CHRISTMAS PARTY --?



HOME...

NOW, GO TO YOUR ROOM AND CHANGE -- YOU CAN'T GO DRESSED LIKE SOME KIND OF... VAMPIRE!

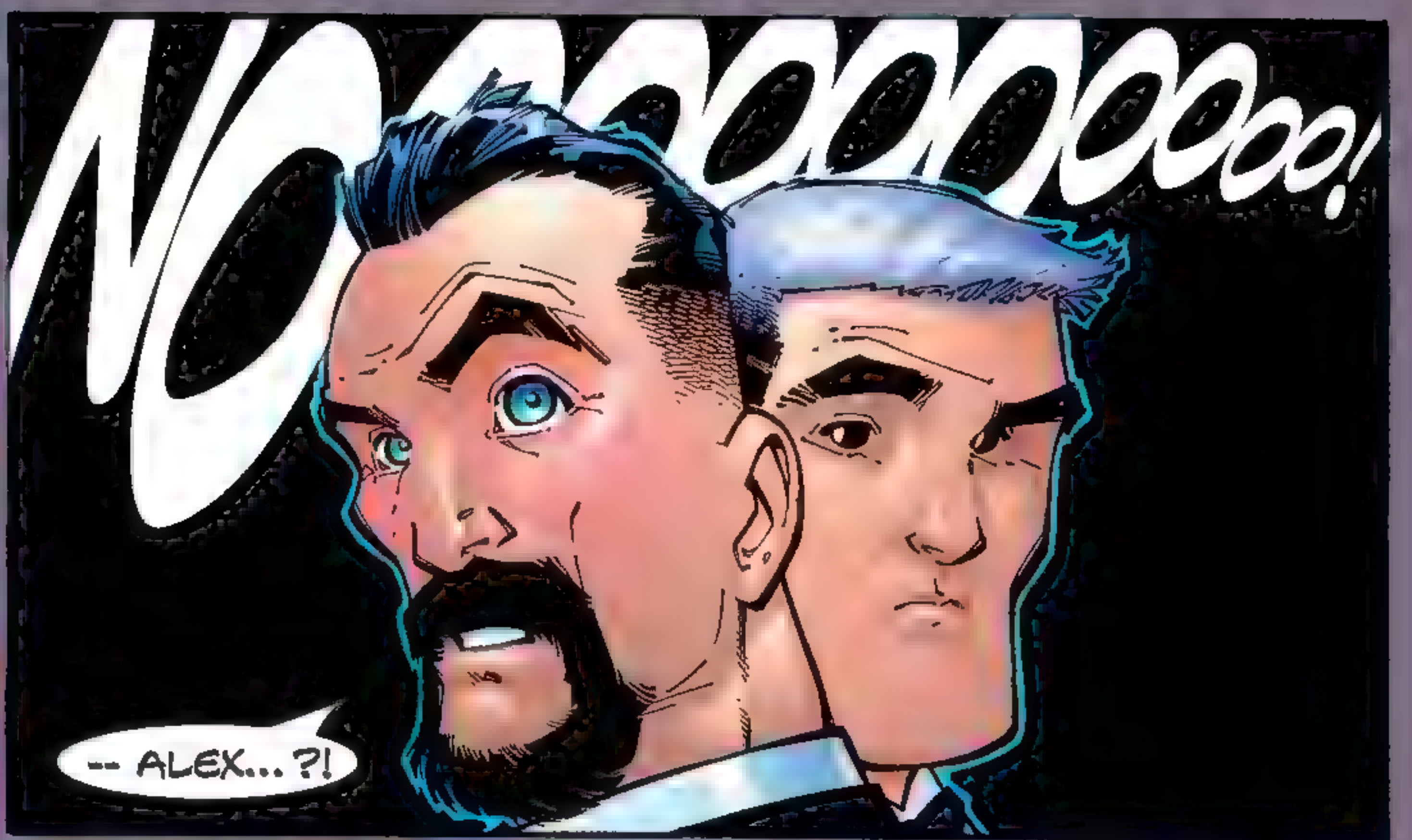






THIS IS **GREAT** --
IF UNEXPECTED --
NEWS, VICTOR! YOU'LL
BE A WONDERFUL
PRESIDENT!

ODDLY
ENOUGH, I
AGREE -- AND
WANT YOU
RIGHT AT MY
SIDE, BILL.



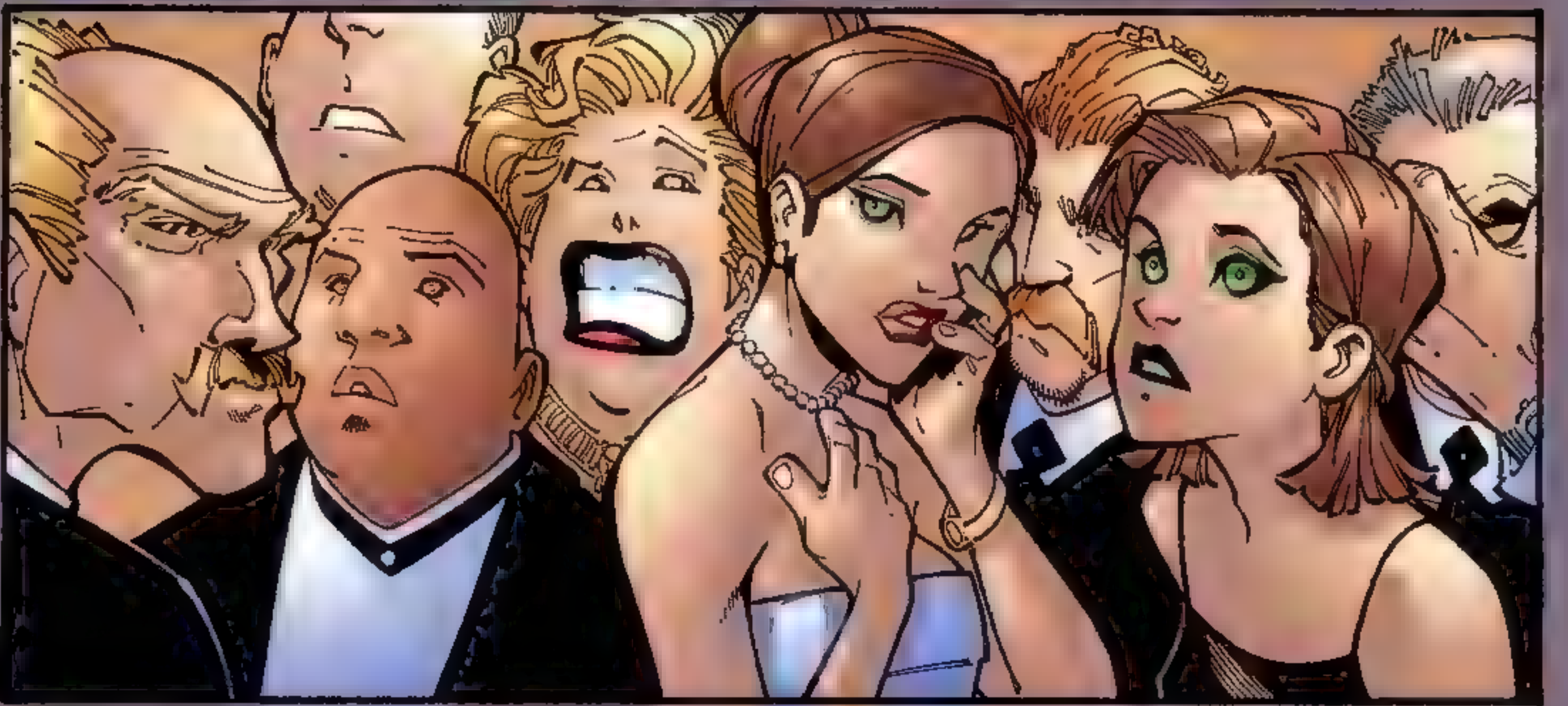
-- ALEX...?!



DO YOU
ACTUALLY
THINK I
DON'T KNOW
WHAT YOU'RE
UP TO, VAN
FLEET?!

DO YOU THINK I'M GOING
TO STAND BY AND LET YOU
DRAG THE **COUNTRY** -- AND
MY FATHER -- STRAIGHT
INTO **HELL**?!

SHE
TOLD YOU TO
PUNISH **ME** --
RIGHT?!



IT WON'T WORK,
YOU STINKING
VAMPIRE!

ALEX --
ARE YOU
INSANE?!



**STOP
IT, NOW!**

GMAK



ALEX...
I...

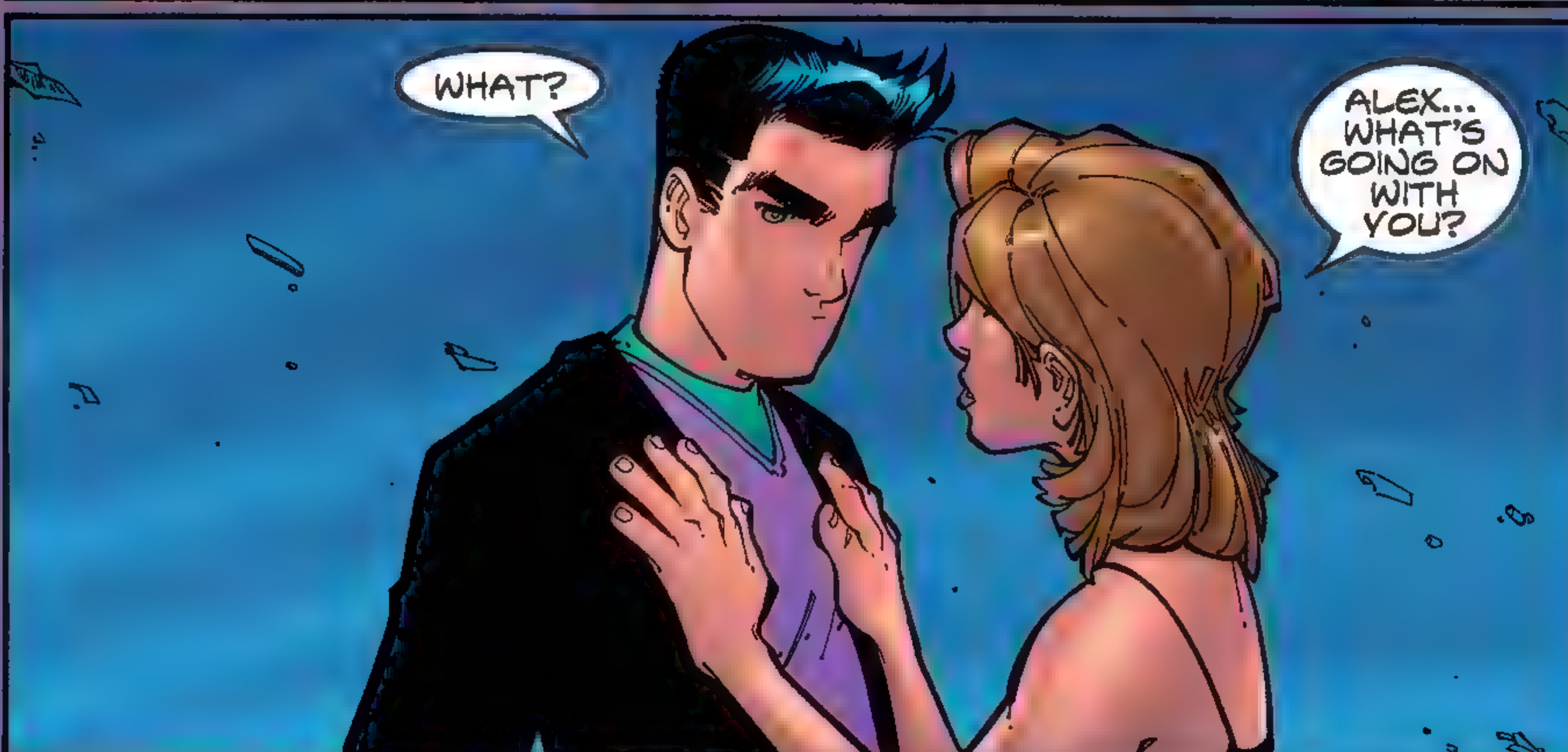
RELAX, BILL -- I'VE BEEN CALLED
WORSE. I THINK **TEENAGE PASSION**
CAN BE A **GOOD THING**...



...IF IT CAN BE DIRECTED.



ALEX --
WAIT!



WHAT?

ALEX...
WHAT'S
GOING ON
WITH
YOU?



THAT'S AN
EXCELLENT
QUESTION...
... ESPECIALLY
FROM SOMEONE
WHO'S SUPPOSED
TO BE DEAD!

THAT
WASN'T
FUNNY BEFORE,
ALEX; IT'S
NOT FUNNY
NOW...

OH...
WAIT, I
GET
IT.



THIS IS STILL
ABOUT THE
ACCIDENT,
ISN'T IT?

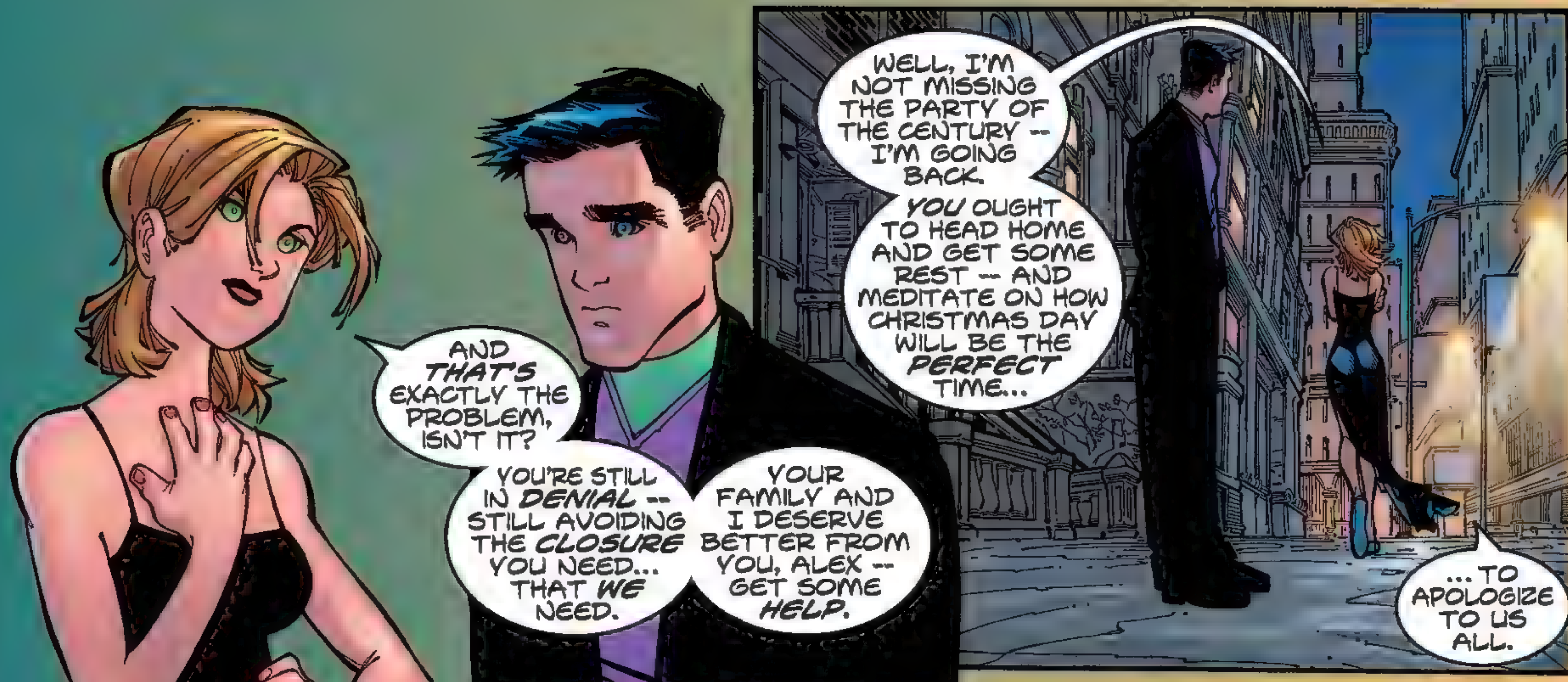
ACCIDENT --?

THE CAR ACCIDENT IN CENTRAL
PARK? THE ONE THAT KILLED
YOUR FRIENDS AND LEFT
YOU IN A COMA FOR
THREE MONTHS...



IS... THAT... POSSIBLE...?
IS MY VAMPIRE-LIFE
NOTHING MORE THAN A
NIGHTMARE FROM
MY MONTHS IN A
COMA?

I'M... SORRY,
JULIE... I'M
TRYING TO
FORGET ABOUT
THAT...



AND THAT'S EXACTLY THE PROBLEM, ISN'T IT?

YOU'RE STILL IN DENIAL -- STILL AVOIDING THE CLOSURE YOU NEED... THAT WE NEED.

YOUR FAMILY AND I DESERVE BETTER FROM YOU, ALEX -- GET SOME HELP.

WELL, I'M NOT MISSING THE PARTY OF THE CENTURY -- I'M GOING BACK.

YOU OUGHT TO HEAD HOME AND GET SOME REST -- AND MEDITATE ON HOW CHRISTMAS DAY WILL BE THE PERFECT TIME...

... TO APOLOGIZE TO US ALL.

NO DREAMS OF SUGARPLUMS HAUNT ALEX'S DREAMS -- HE SLEEPS THE SLEEP OF THE LIVING TILL MORNING...

...UM-NUMMA? M'NIN... A'REDDY? SUNSHINE...



SUN?!
NOOOO!

I'LL BURN!

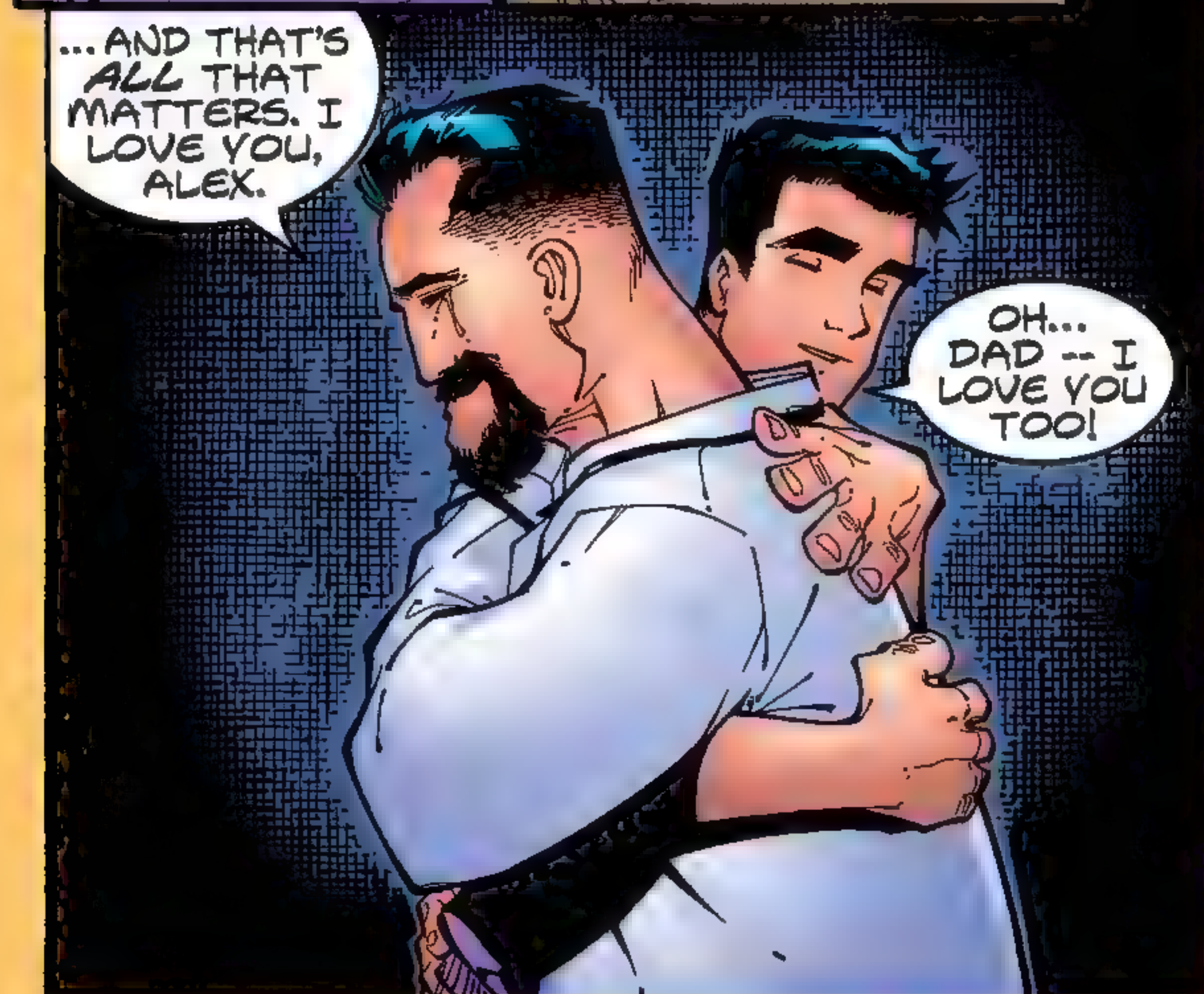
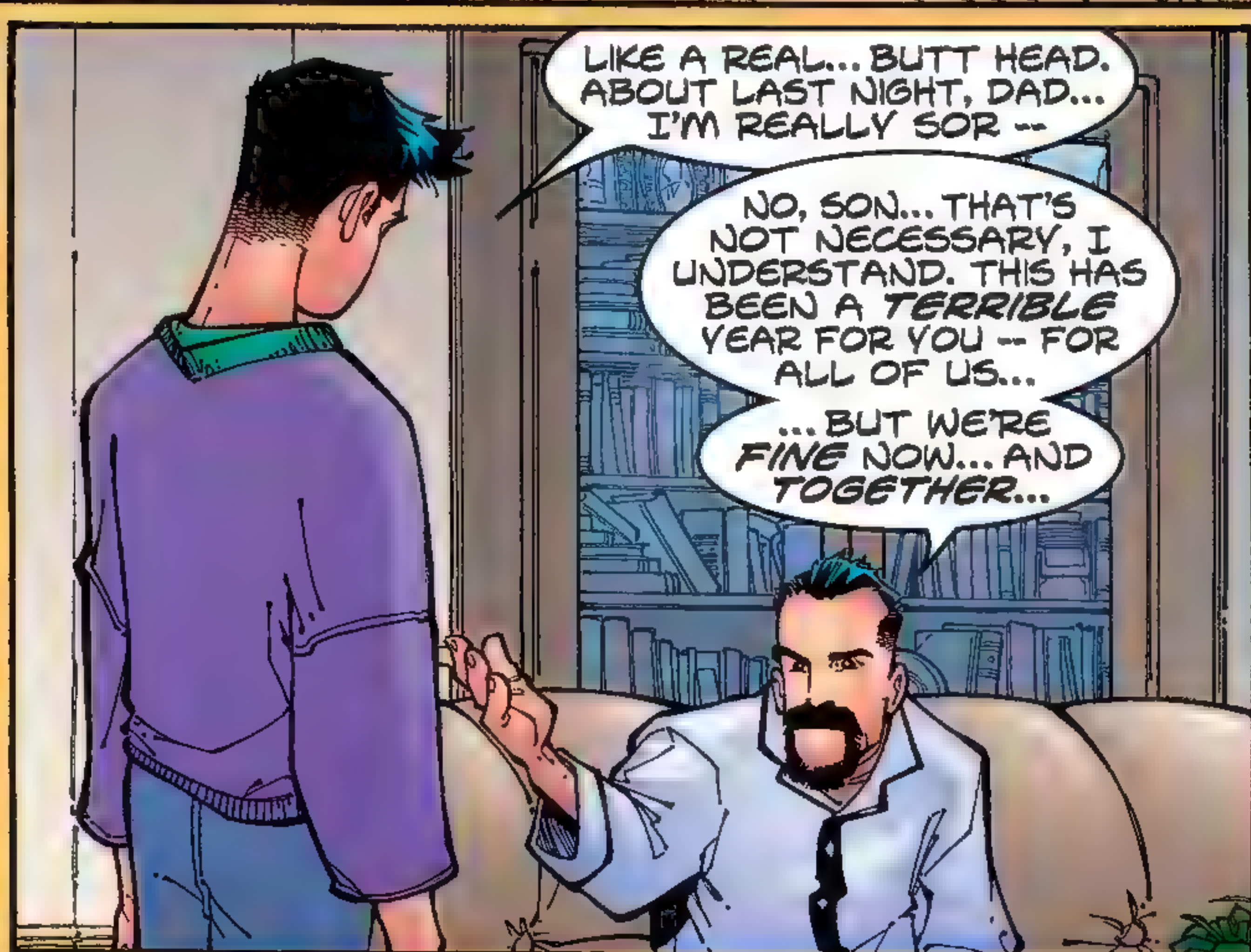
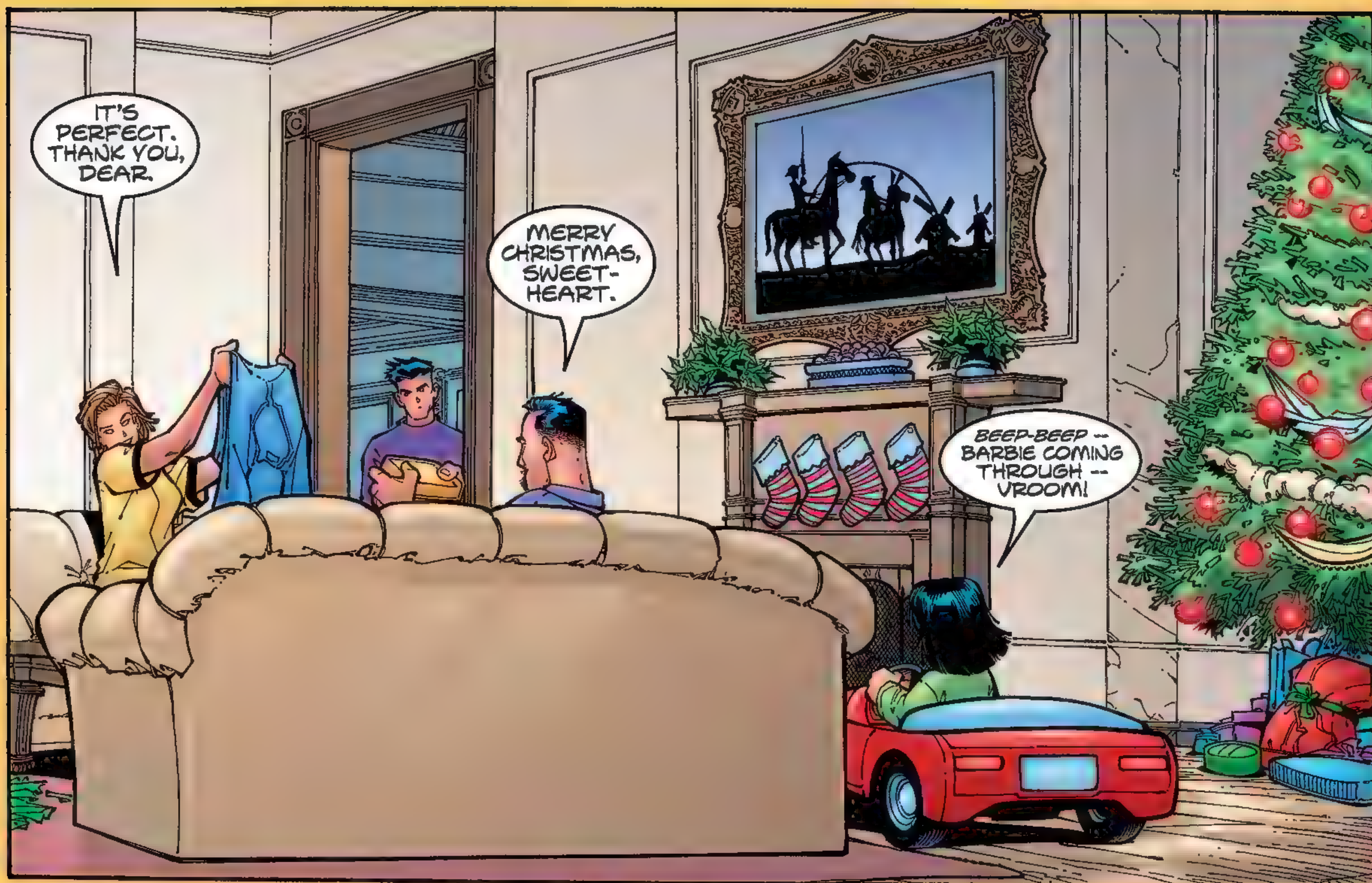


I'LL... I'LL...
...FEEL KINDA... WARM...?



I'M NOT BURNING? I'M... HUMAN...?

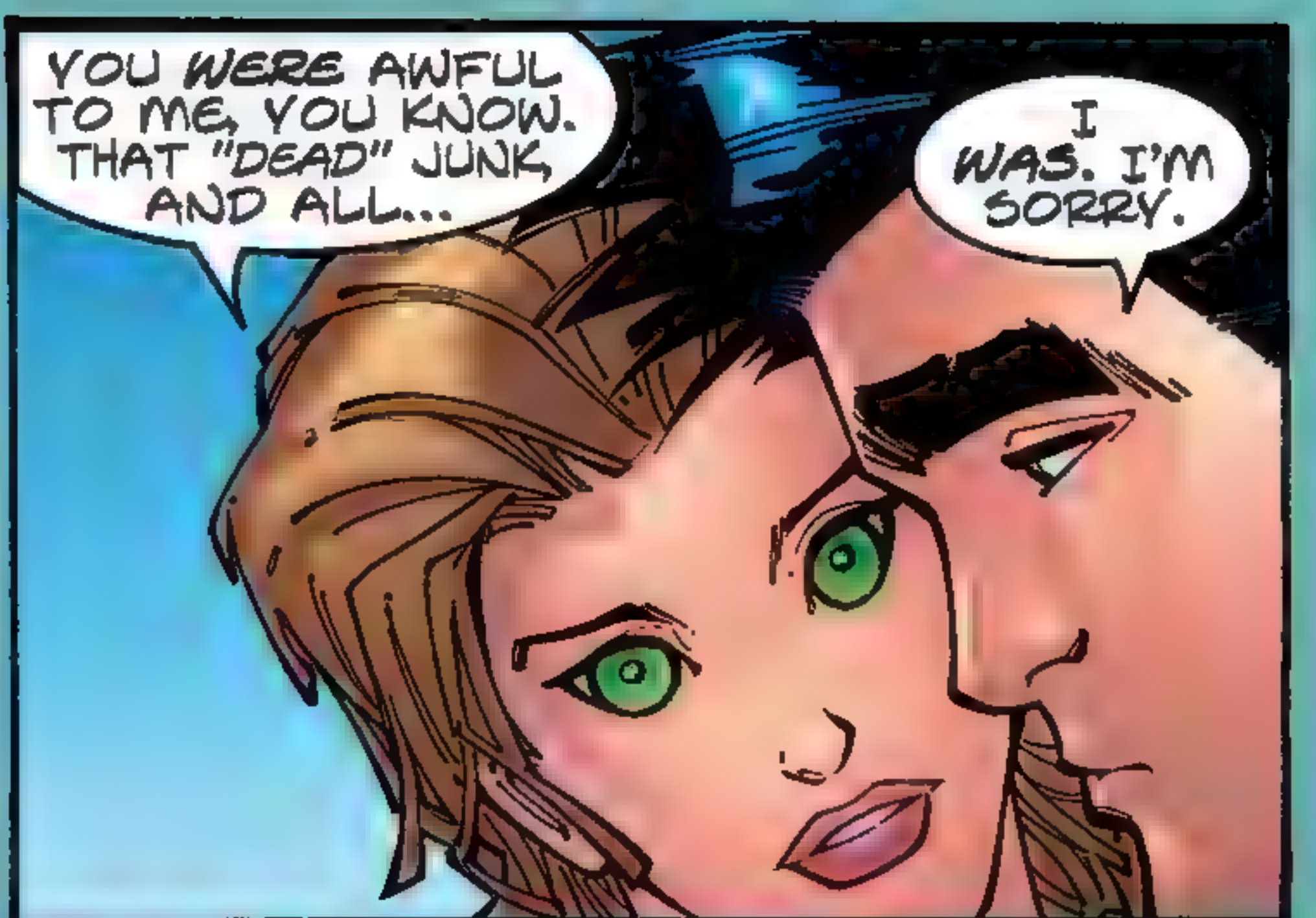
THEN JULIE WAS TELLING IT STRAIGHT -- AND ALL MY HORROR WAS NOTHING BUT A NIGHTMARE!





... PATCHED EVERYTHING UP, EH? GOOD FOR YOU.
IF I FORGIVE YOU, YOU'LL BE ALL SET, WON'T YOU?

IF?



YOU WERE AWFUL TO ME, YOU KNOW. THAT "DEAD" JUNK AND ALL...

I WAS. I'M SORRY.



UM... MERRY CHRISTMAS...
FOR ME...?!



ALEX!
IT'S A BEAUTIFUL NECKLACE --
THANK YOU!

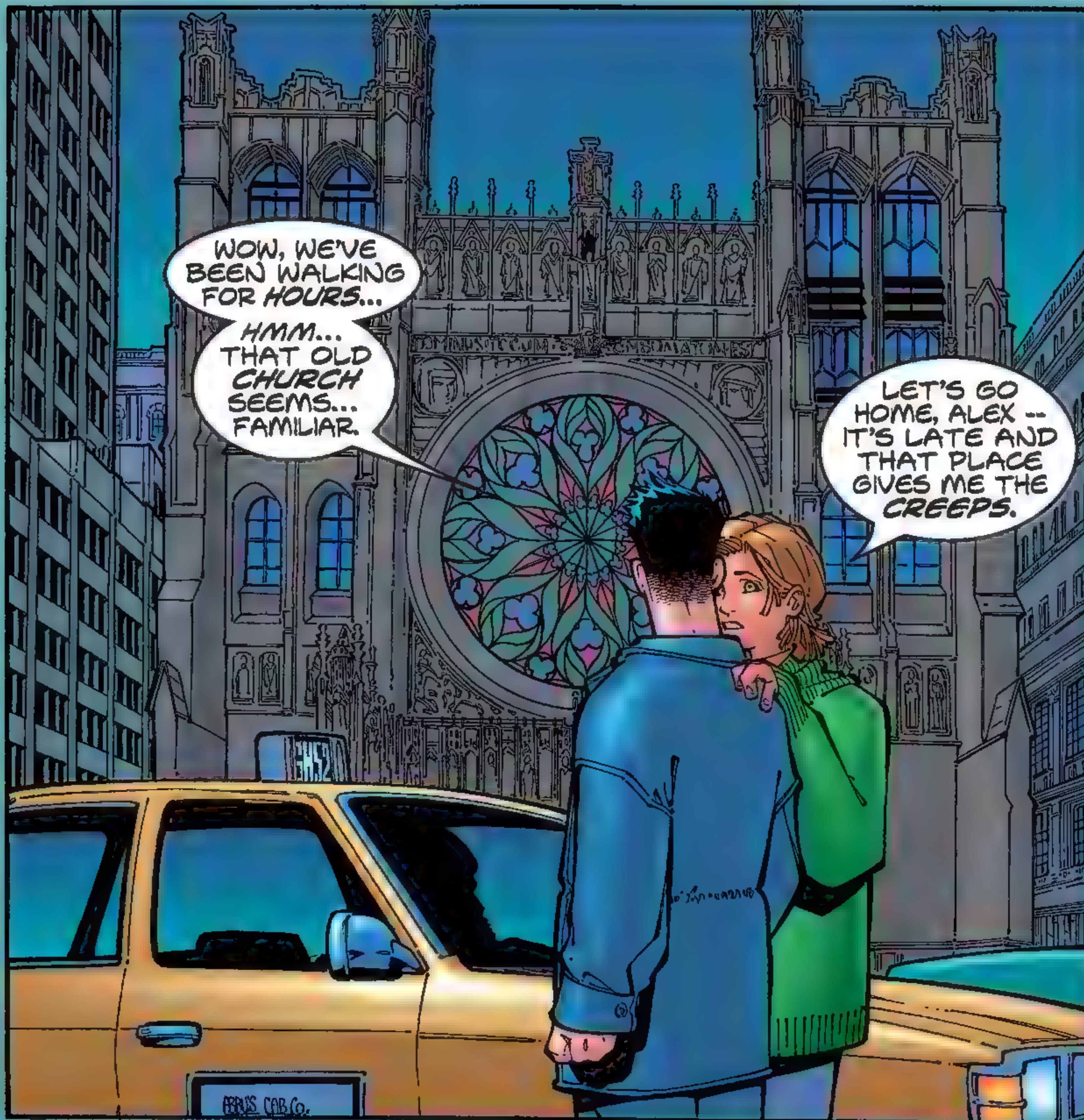


HERE, HELP ME PUT THIS --
ALEX? WHAT'S WRONG?

I JUST HAD A TOUCH OF DEJA-VU FOR SOME REASON.
BUT, NOTHING'S WRONG -- IN FACT, EVERYTHING'S GREAT! I FEEL BETTER THAN I HAVE FOR A LONG TIME!



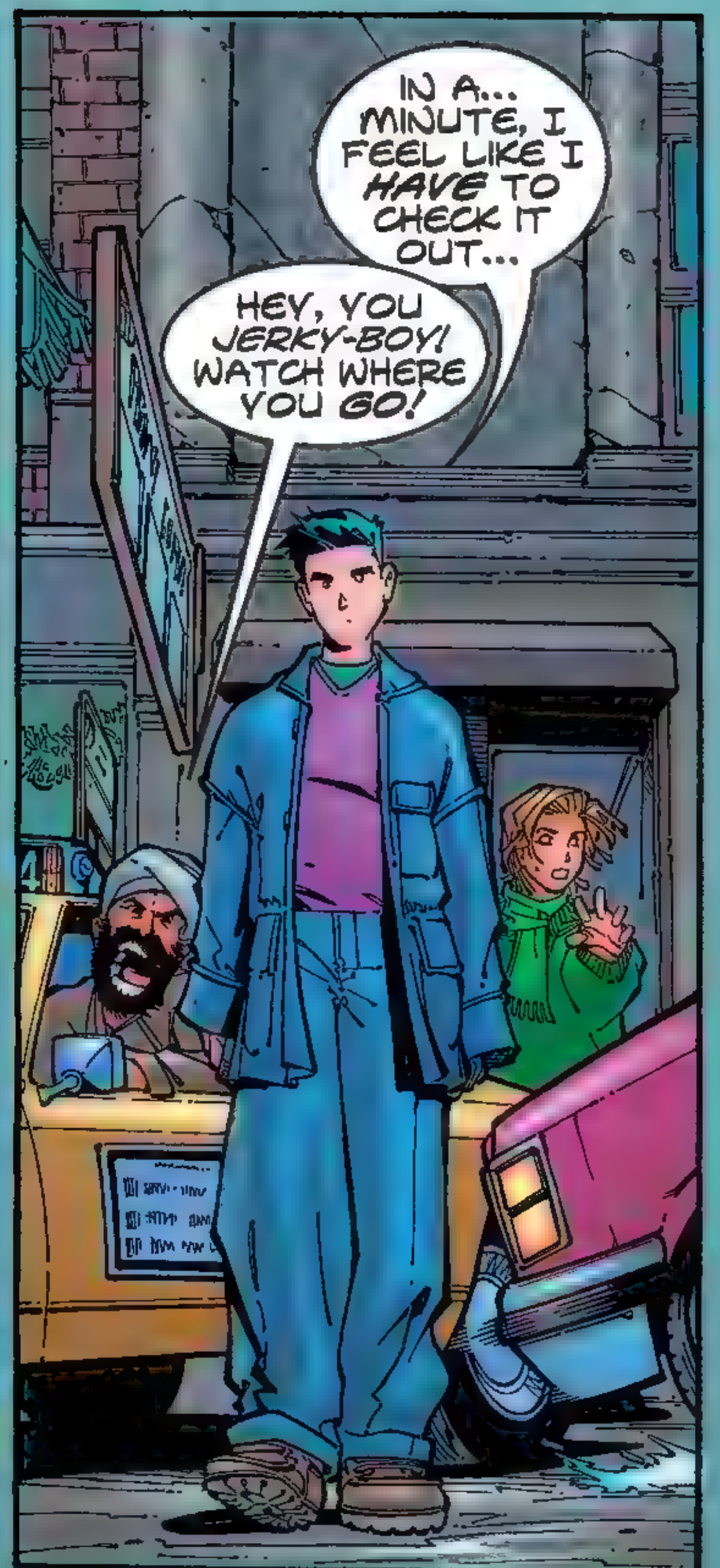
MERRY CHRISTMAS, SWEET-HEART.



WOW, WE'VE BEEN WALKING FOR HOURS...

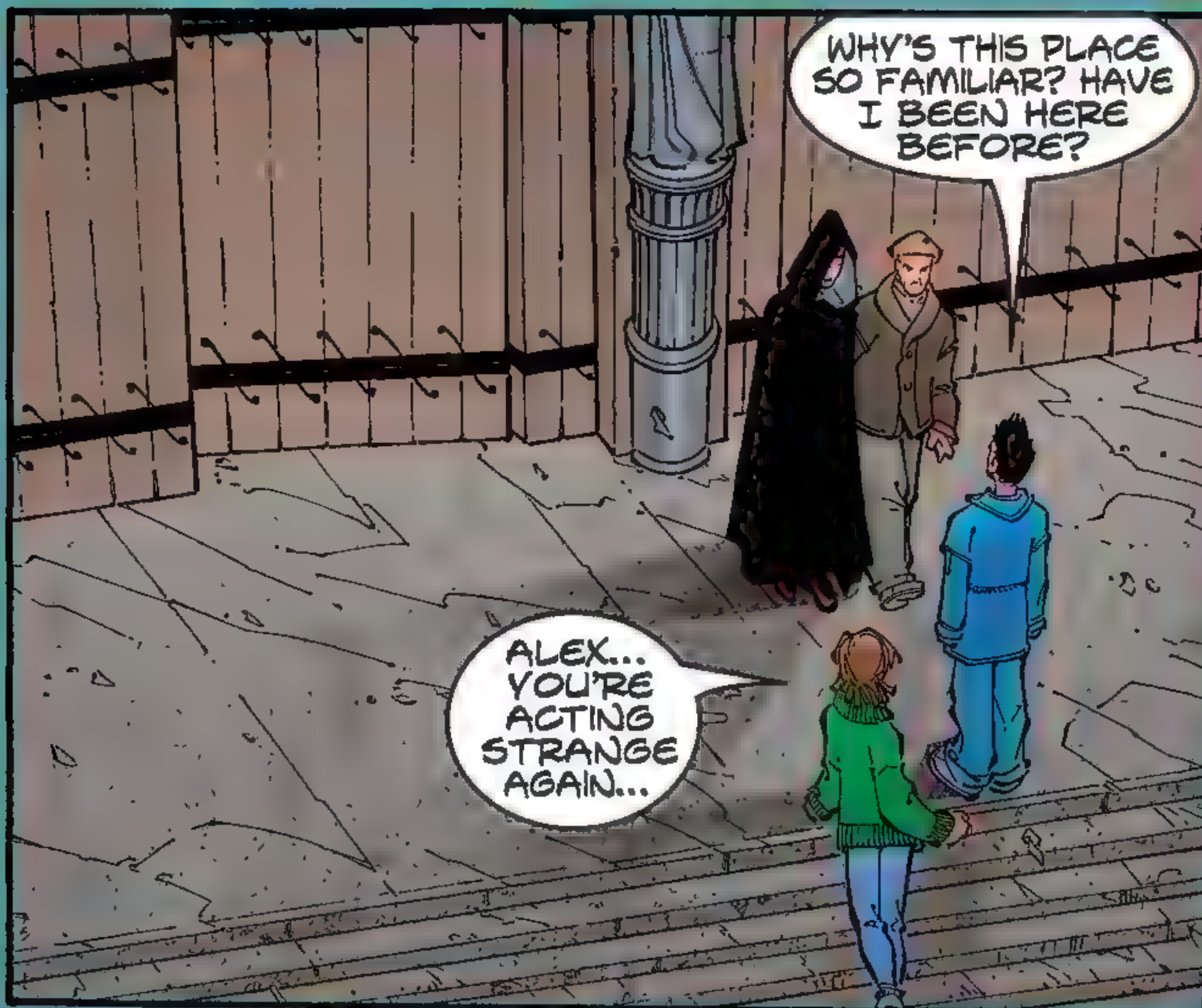
HMM... THAT OLD CHURCH SEEMS... FAMILIAR.

LET'S GO HOME, ALEX -- IT'S LATE AND THAT PLACE GIVES ME THE CREEPS.



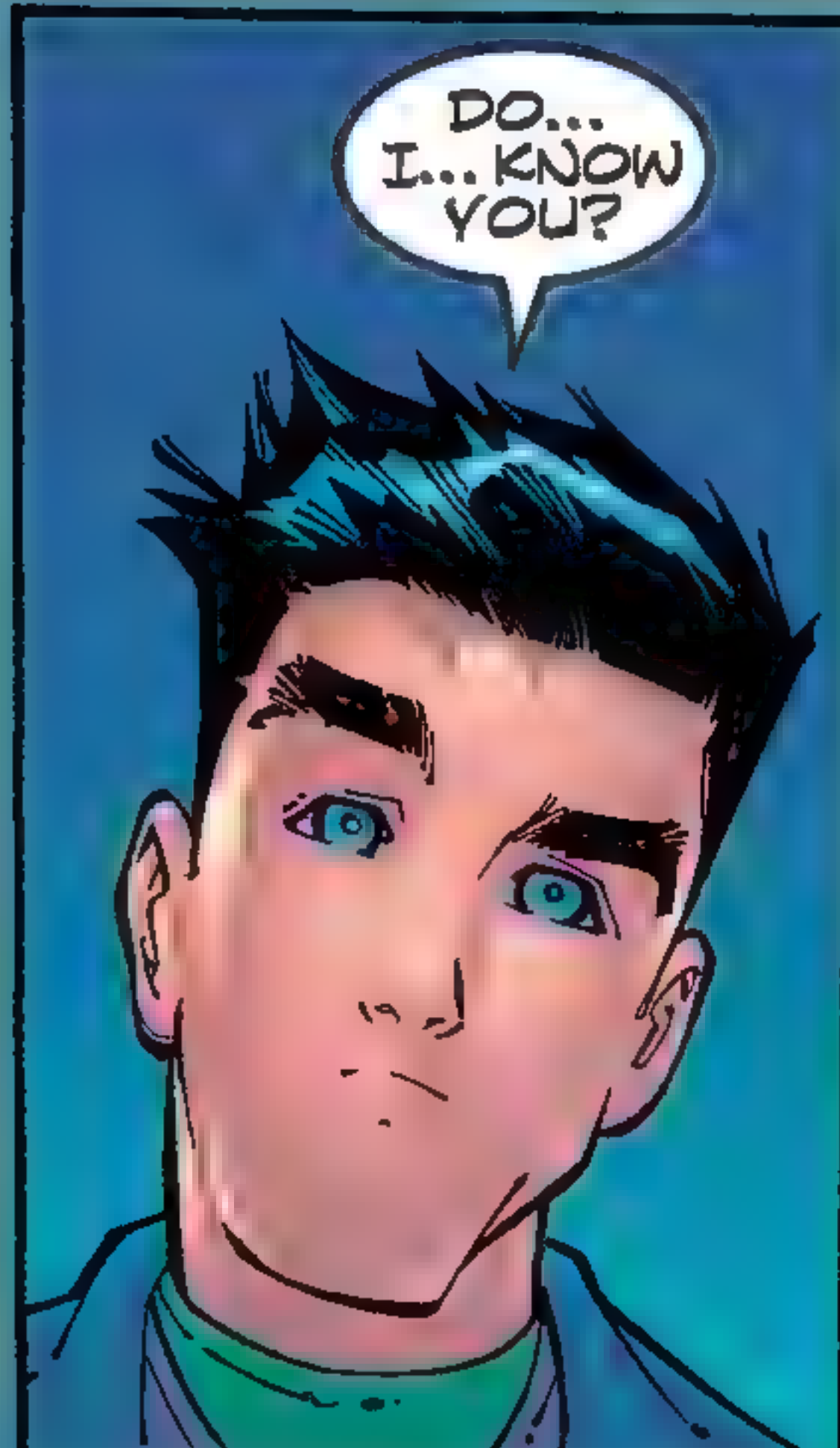
IN A... MINUTE, I FEEL LIKE I HAVE TO CHECK IT OUT...

HEY, YOU JERKY-BOY! WATCH WHERE YOU GO!



WHY'S THIS PLACE SO FAMILIAR? HAVE I BEEN HERE BEFORE?

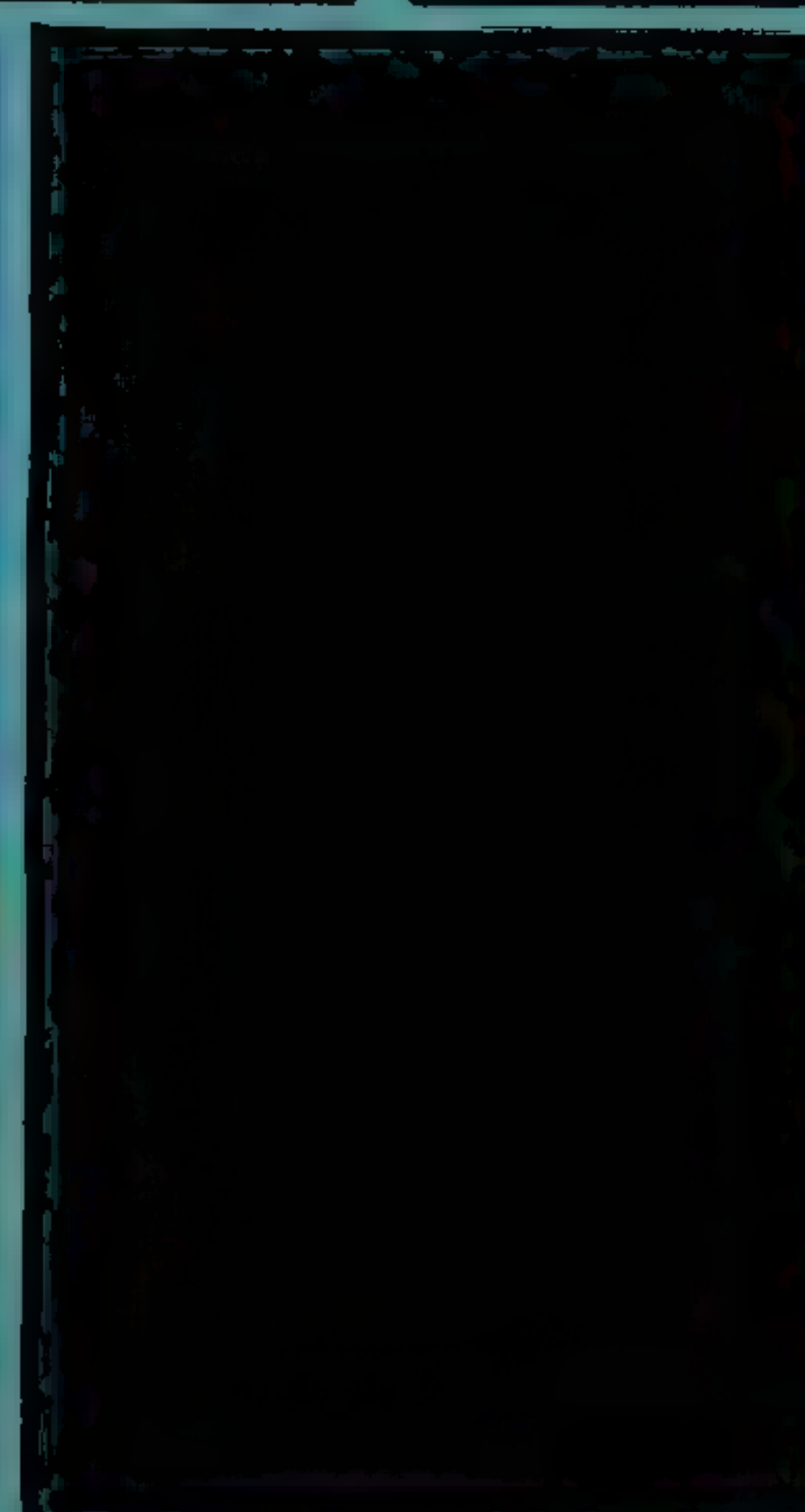
ALEX... YOU'RE ACTING STRANGE AGAIN...



DO... I... KNOW YOU?



GOOD QUESTION. DO YOU?



WEIRD. HEY, IT'S OPEN...

K
R
E
E
K



STAY HERE IF YOU WANT, BUT I'M GOING IN -- I HAVE TO.



ALEX... BE CAREFUL.



IT'S STILL A DUMP...
...WAIT, **HOW** COULD I **KNOW** THAT?!



WHAT AM I DOING HERE?
WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR?



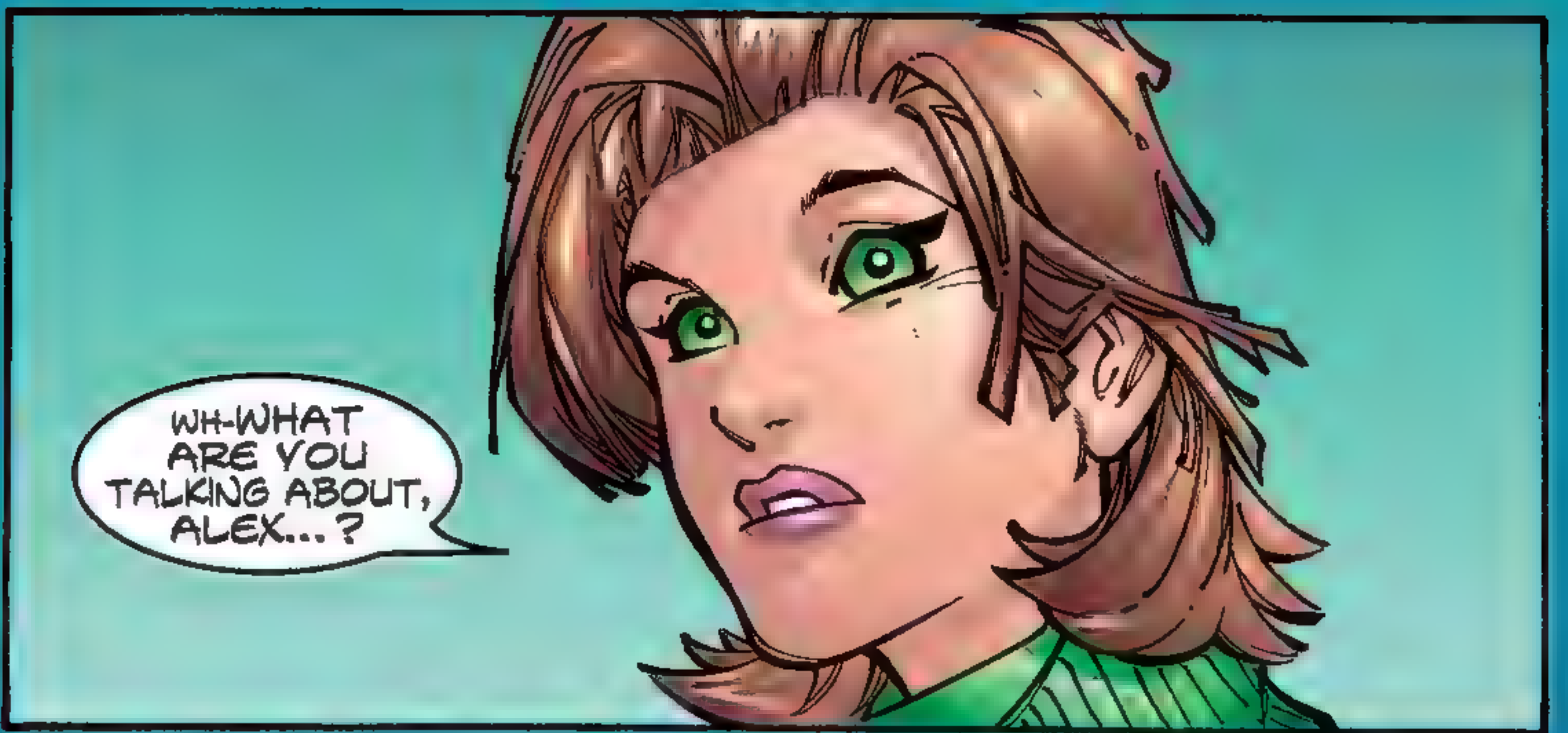
?! EKIMUS?!

OH, GOD -- IF HE'S REAL... MY LIFE IS THE LIE!
OH GOD...
OH GOD...
OH GOD...!





IT'S ALL
REAL, JULIE!
MY HUMANITY'S
THE DREAM...
...EVERY-
THING
IS LOST...
LOST!

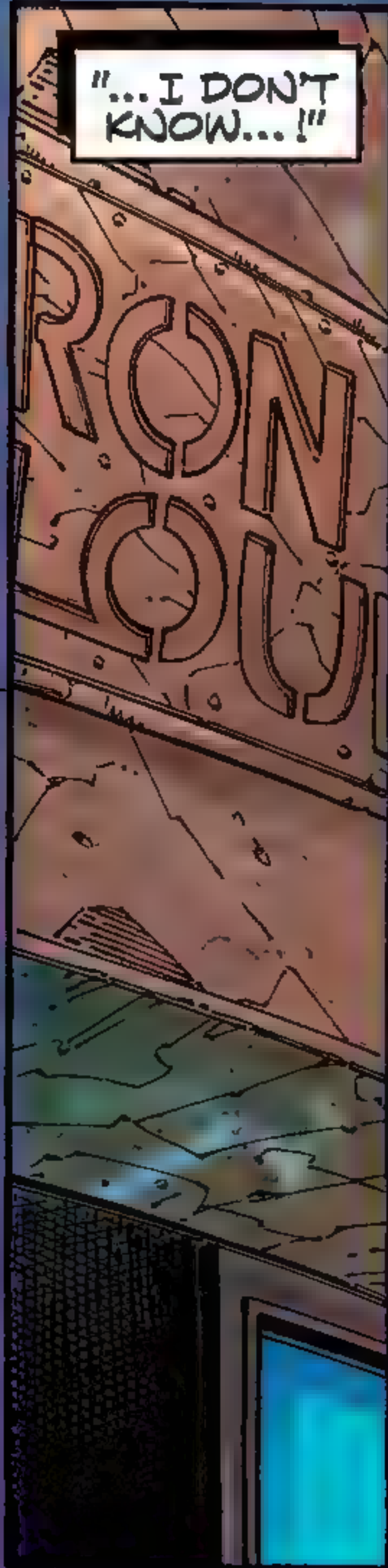


WH-WHAT
ARE YOU
TALKING ABOUT,
ALEX...?

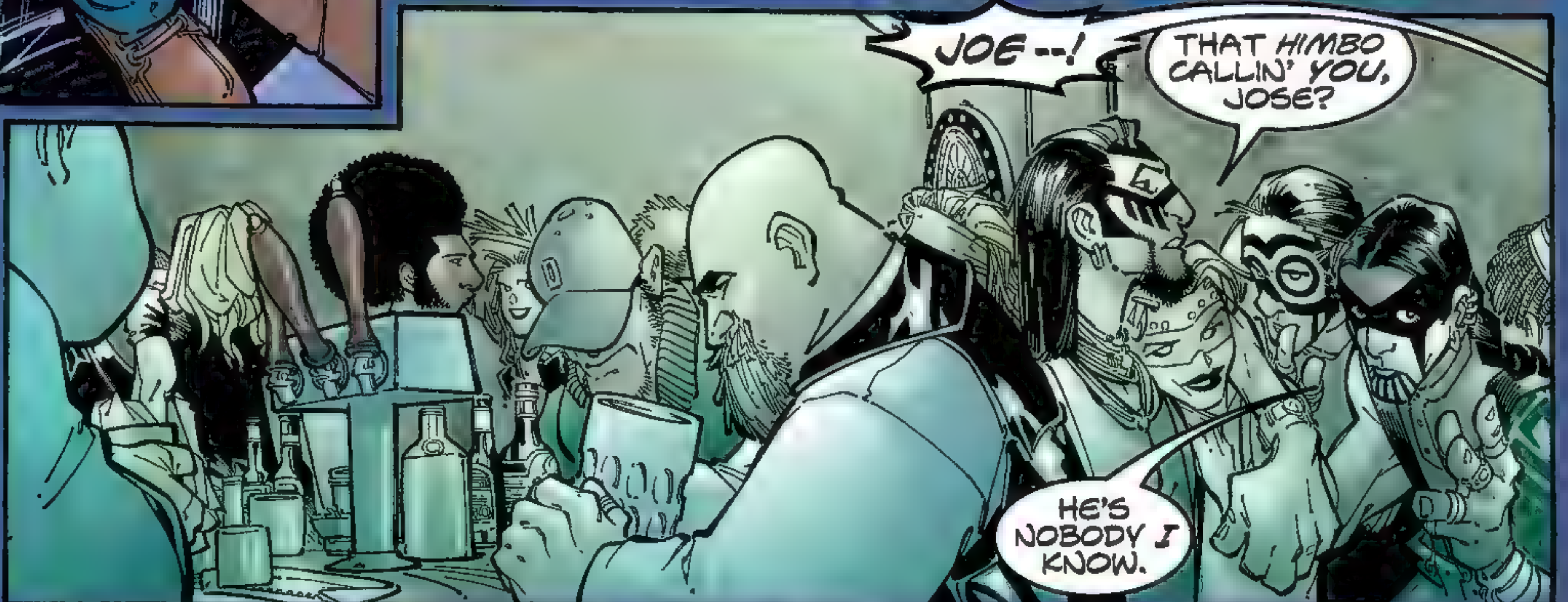


I HAVE
TO GO...
HAVE TO
FIND... I...
I...

WAIT...
WHERE
ARE YOU
GOING?!



"...I DON'T
KNOW...!"



JOE --!

THAT HIMBO
CALLIN' YOU,
JOSE?

HE'S
NOBODY I
KNOW.



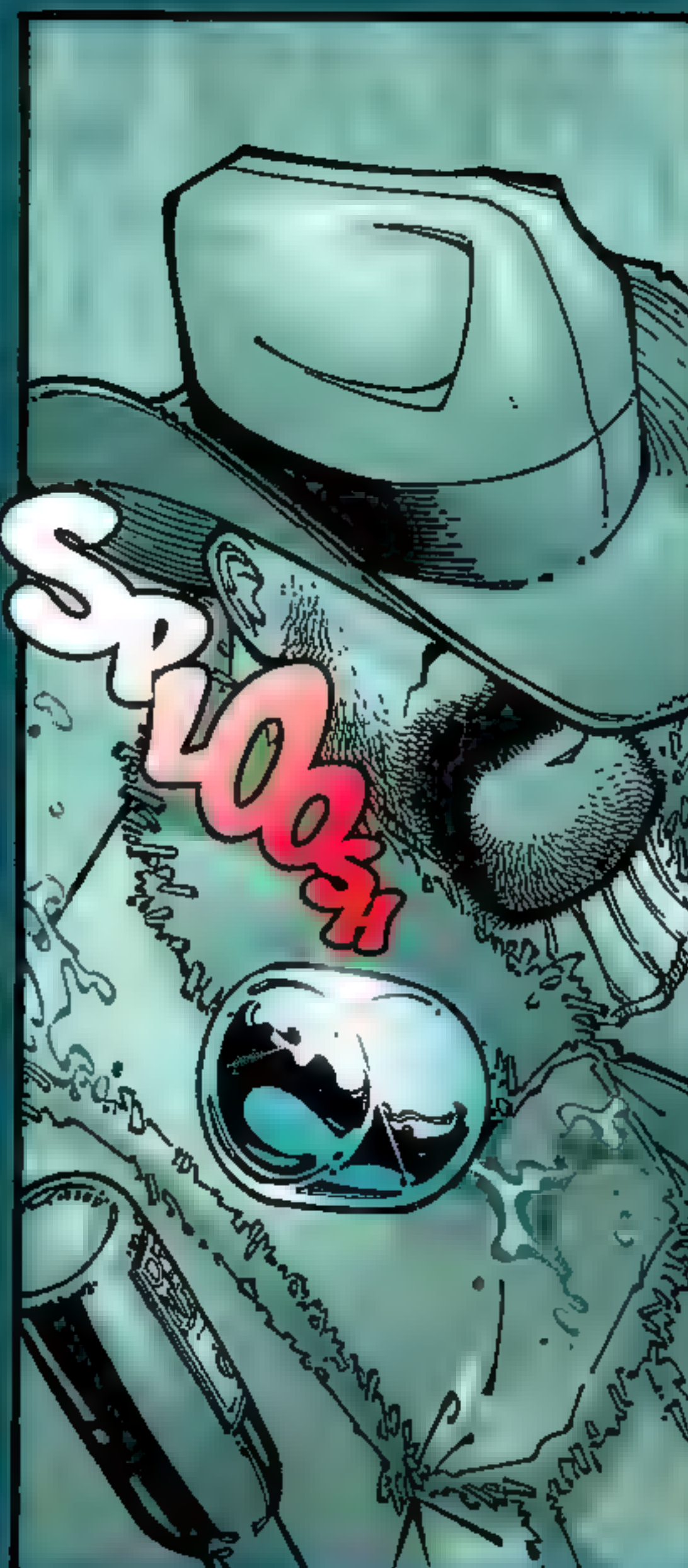
JOE -- EKIMUS
IS DEAD!
THEY KILLED
HIM --!

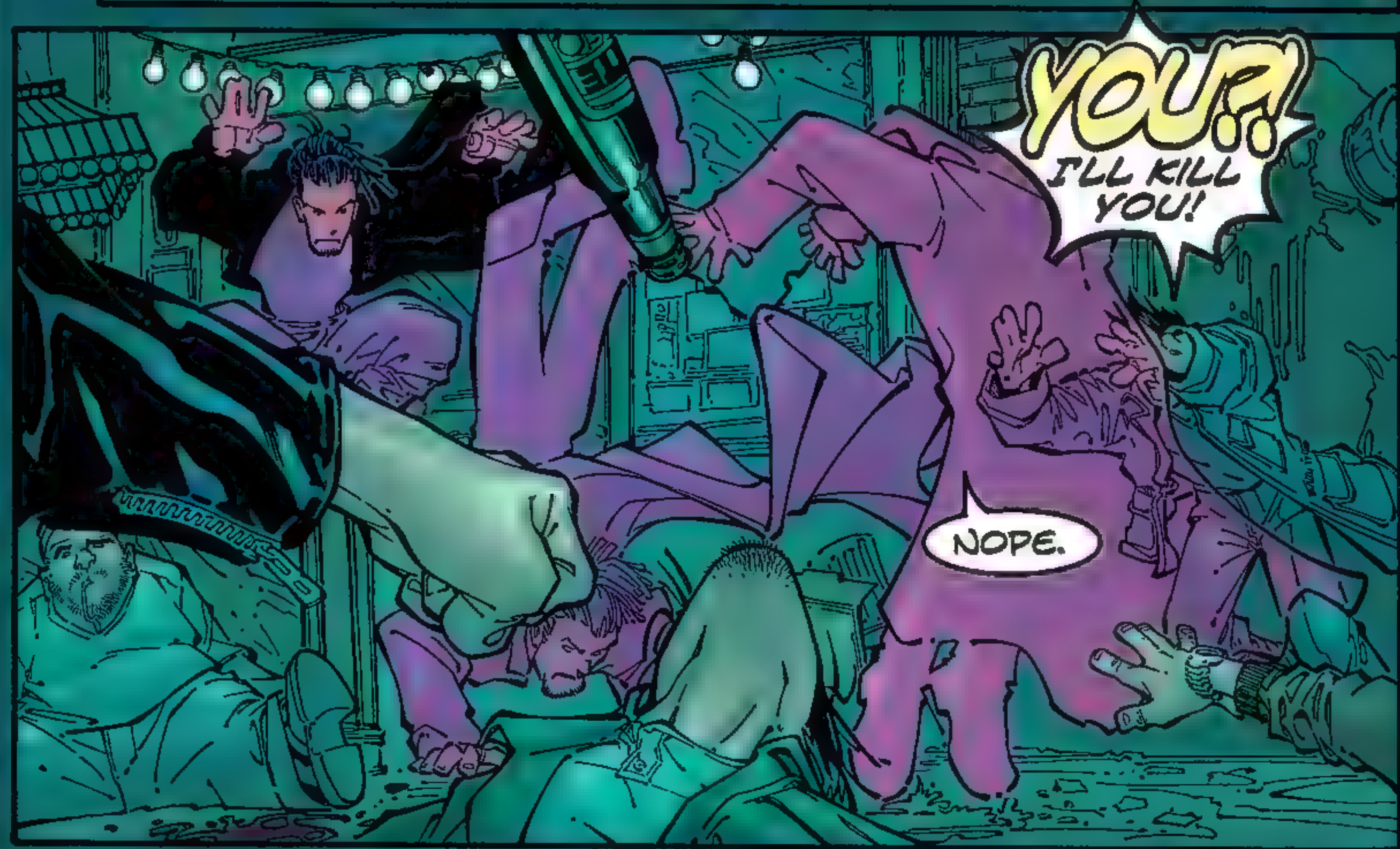
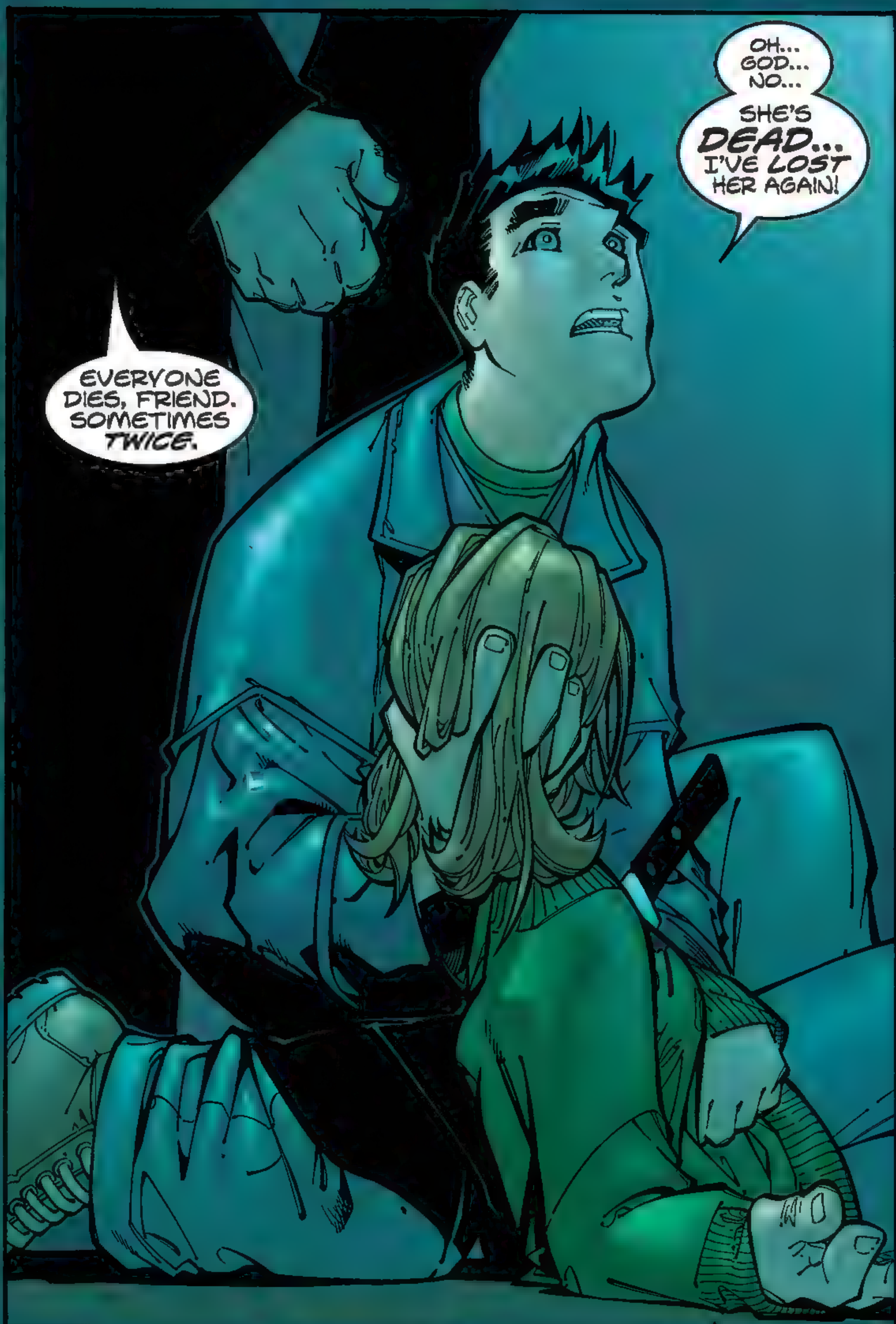
WHO YOU
THINK I AM?
GET OUTTA
HERE, NUT-
BOY...

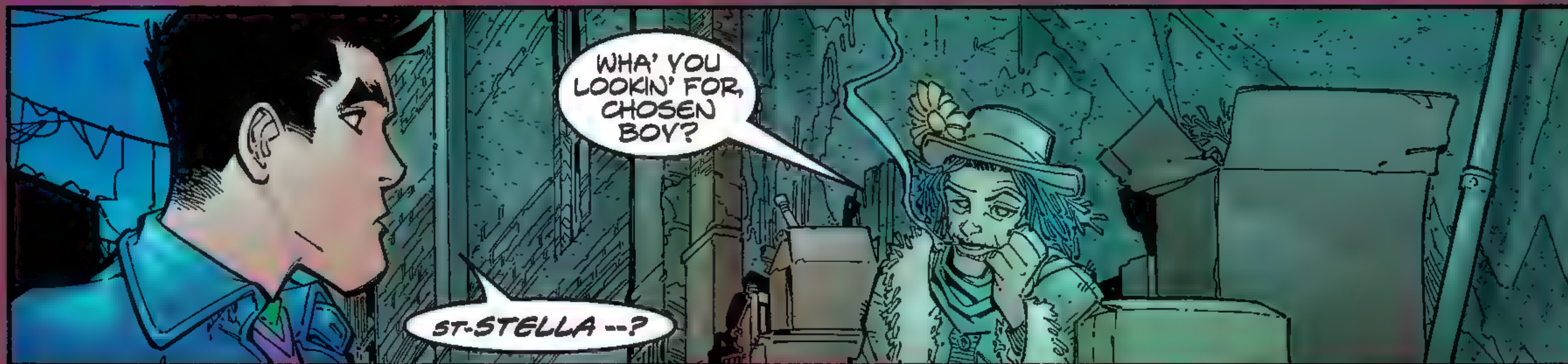


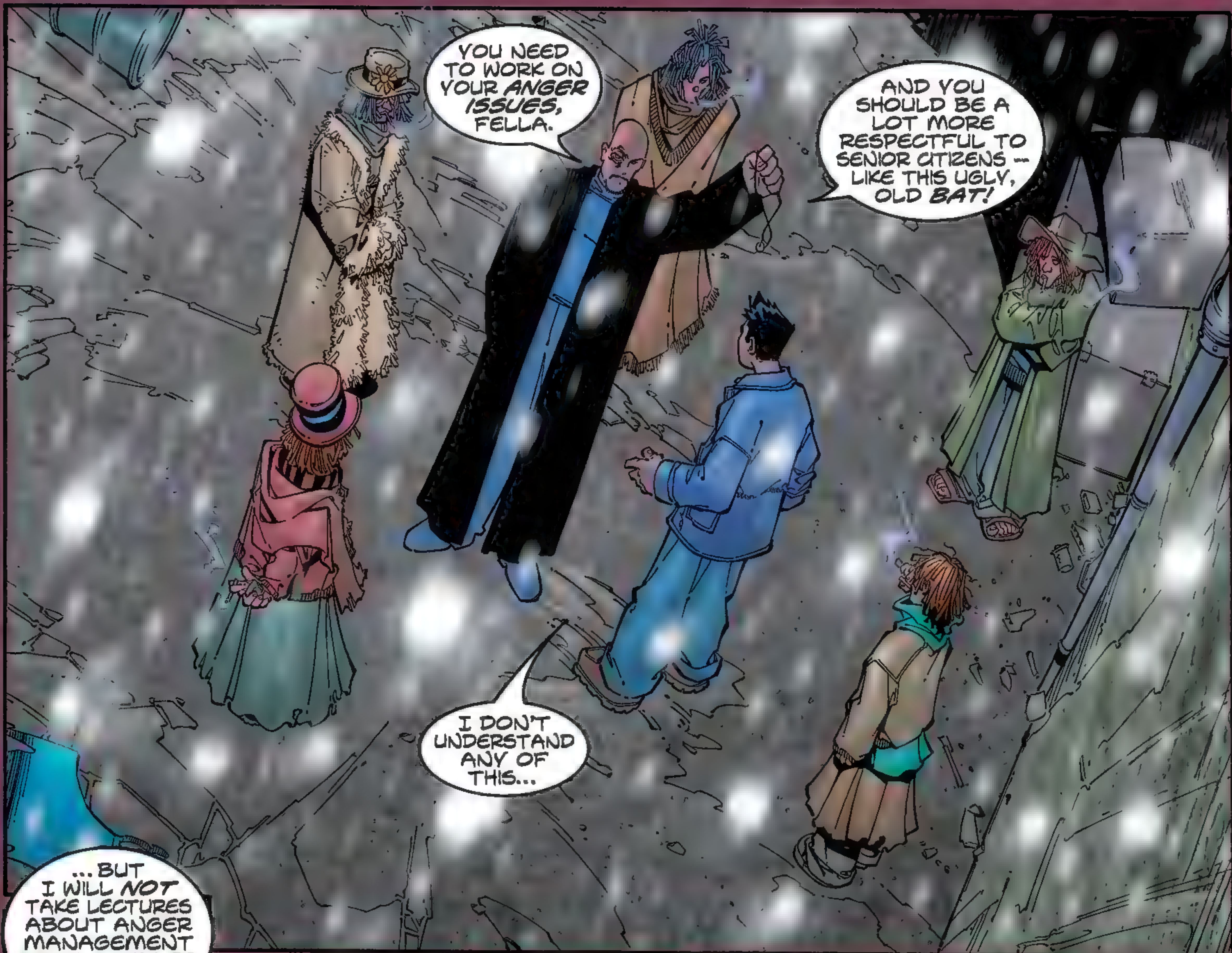
...AN' THE
NAME'S
JOSE! GO
'WAY --!

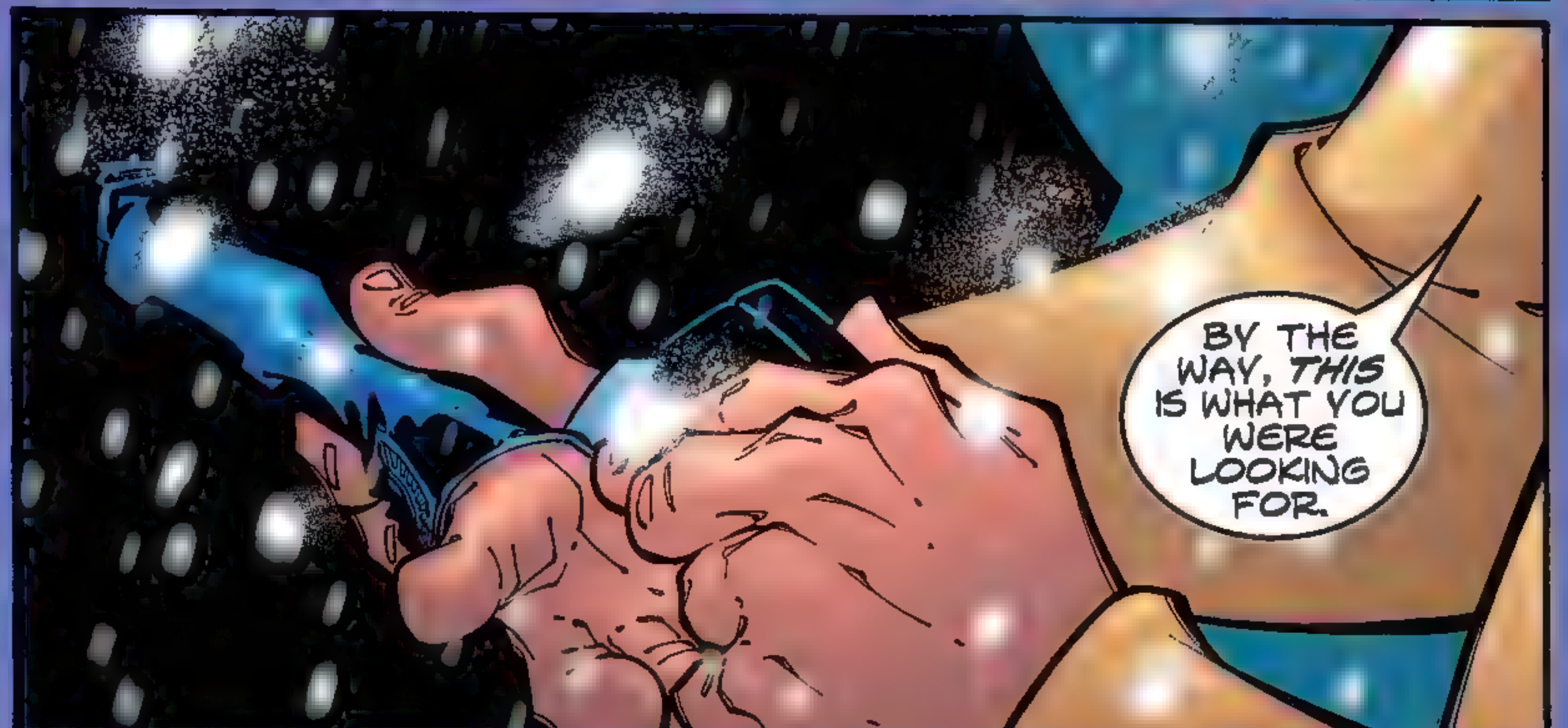
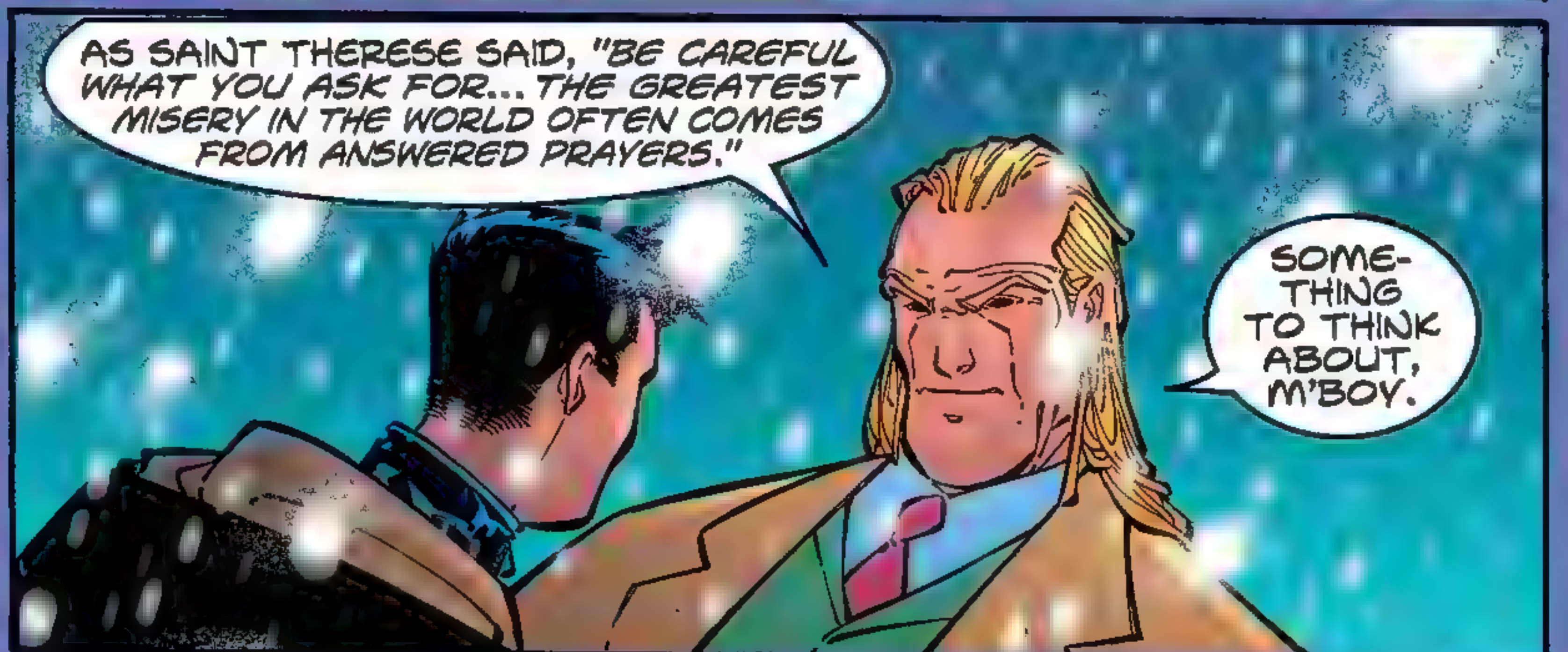
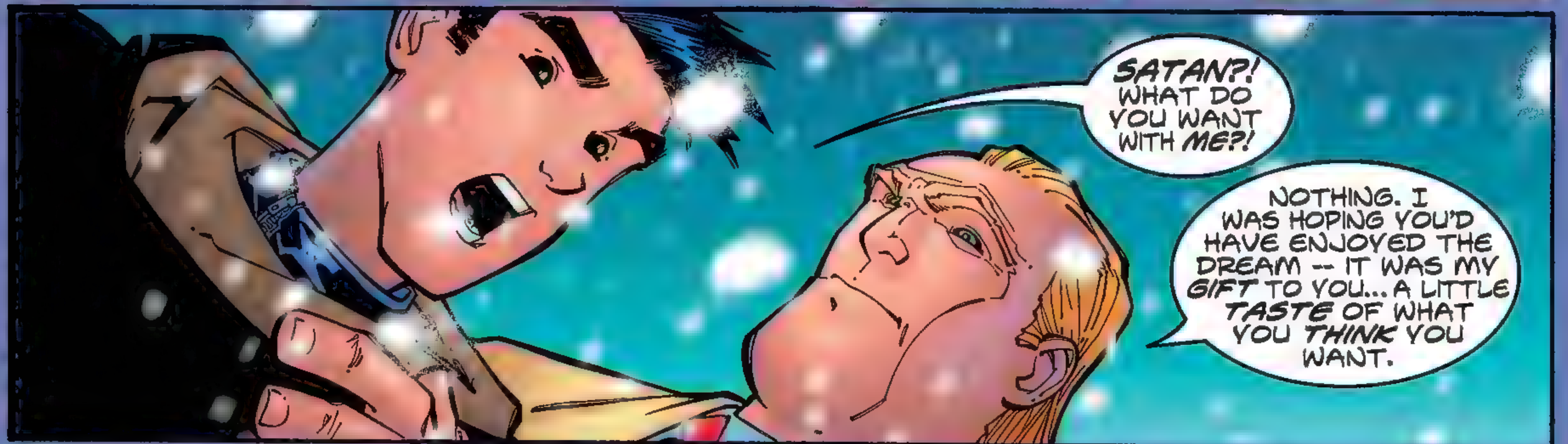
MMFF...!

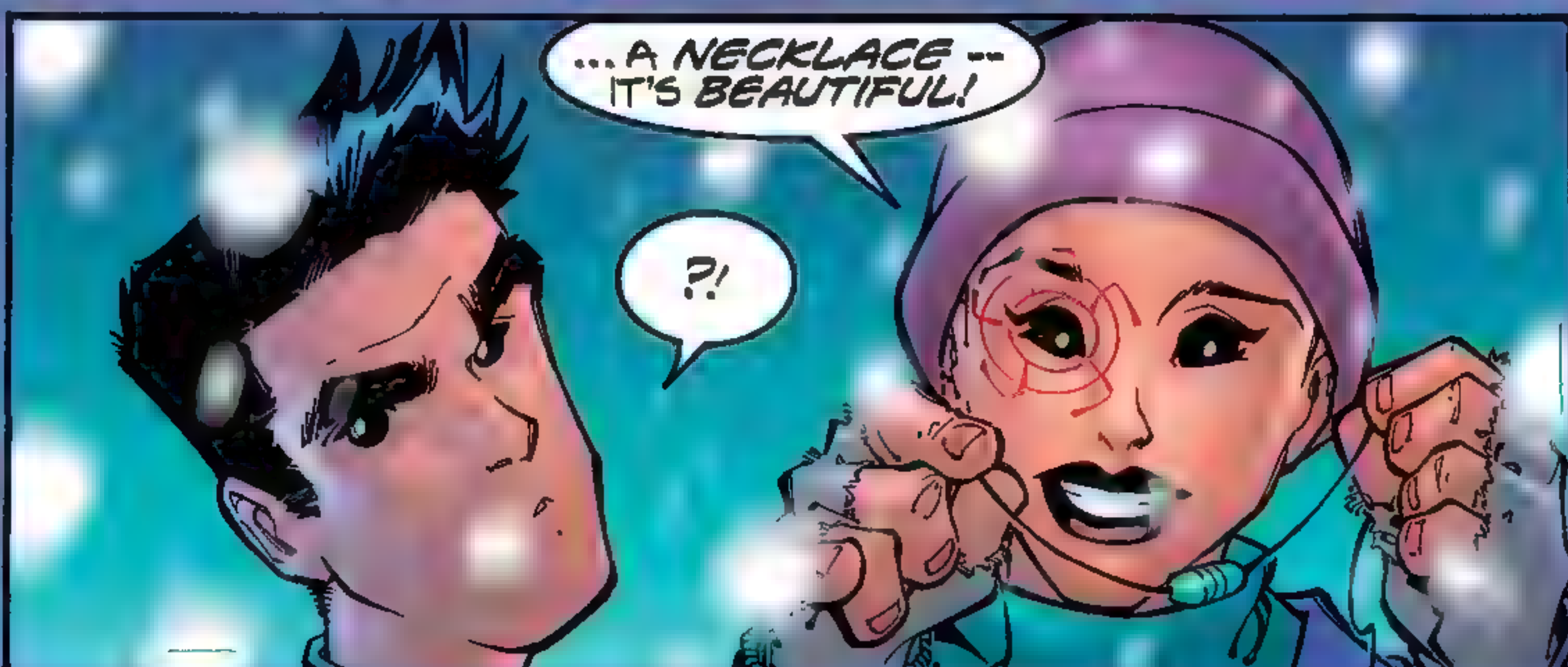
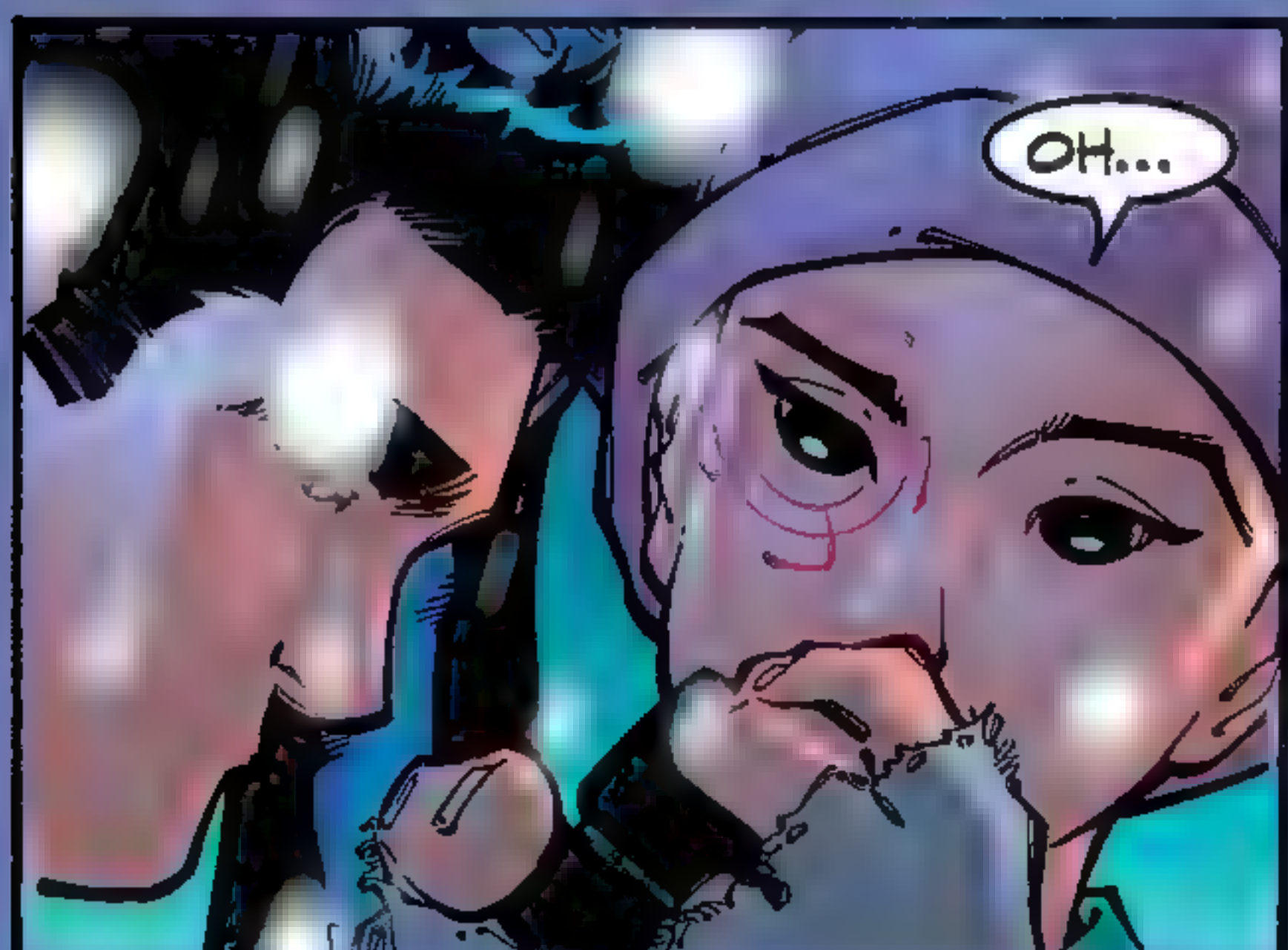
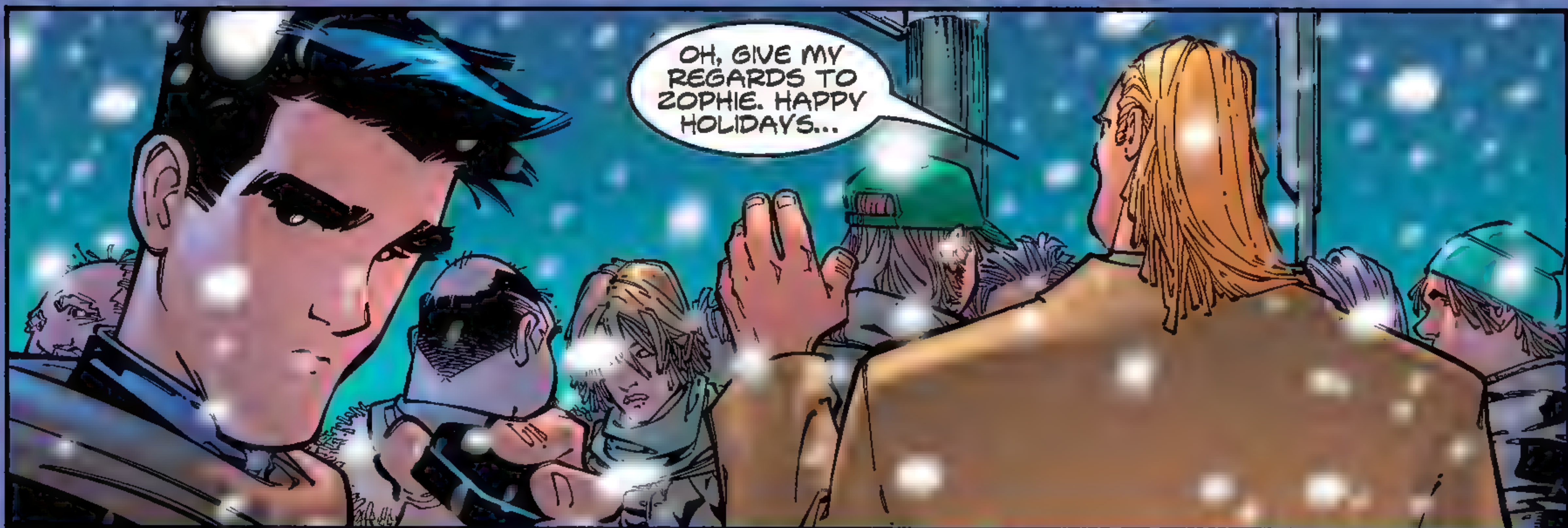












HERE...
THIS IS FOR
YOU.
MERRY
CHRISTMAS,
ALEX!







CHAPTER SIXTEEN

REVELATIONS

SEVEN YEARS AGO,
I MADE THE
ACQUAINTANCE OF
THOSE ELITE
MEMBERS OF THE
KNIGHTS TEMPLAR
KNOWN AS THE
ORDER OF THE
DRAGON.

I WAS IN A UNIQUE
CIRCUMSTANCE --
AND POSSESSED OF VERY
SPECIAL SKILLS -- AND
COULD THUS BE VERY
USEFUL TO THE
GROUP'S MISSION. I
WAS HONORED TO BE
CALLED TO SERVE
WITH THEM.

I KNEW THE ORDER
TO BE MEN OF GOD,
ENGAGED IN THE
MOST VITAL OF
SPIRITUAL WARS --
THE ERADICATION OF
DARK FORCES!
THIS CAUSE
RESONATED WITHIN
MY SOUL... IT WAS
FOR SUCH WORK
THAT I
WAS BORN!

IT WAS BRUTAL WORK,
THOUGH -- AND SEEMINGLY
WITHOUT END. THERE WERE
DEMONS EVERYWHERE!

TO MY HORROR, THOUGH, THE DRAGONS ALSO
HUNTED ANGELS. THE ORDER JUSTIFIED
THIS BY CLAIMING "GOD'S WILL"...

...FOR IF IT WAS NOT SO, WHY WERE
THEY ALLOWED TO KILL THE
CELESTIAL BEINGS AT ALL? GOD
MUST HAVE SENT THE ANGELS
AS REWARDS...

...AND THE
NARCOTICS
THAT WERE
DERIVED
FROM THE
BODIES OF
ANGELS WERE
PERQUISITES
OF A RARE
ORDER.

SOON, I WAS
SUCKED INTO
THIS SKEWED
LOGIC... AND
BEGAN TO
SERIOUSLY
ENJOY THE
WORK.

DURING THE WAR
BETWEEN GOOD AND
EVIL, WE DRAGONS
WERE USED FOR
COVERT MISSIONS --

-- STAGING
LIGHTNING
STRIKE
ASSAULTS
ON THE NESTS
OF DEMONIACS!

IT WAS AT ONE
ENCAMPMENT,
THAT I FIRST SAW
THE... MAN. HE
WAS HUMAN, AND
HE APPEARED TO
BE PATIENTLY
TEACHING THE
BEASTS.

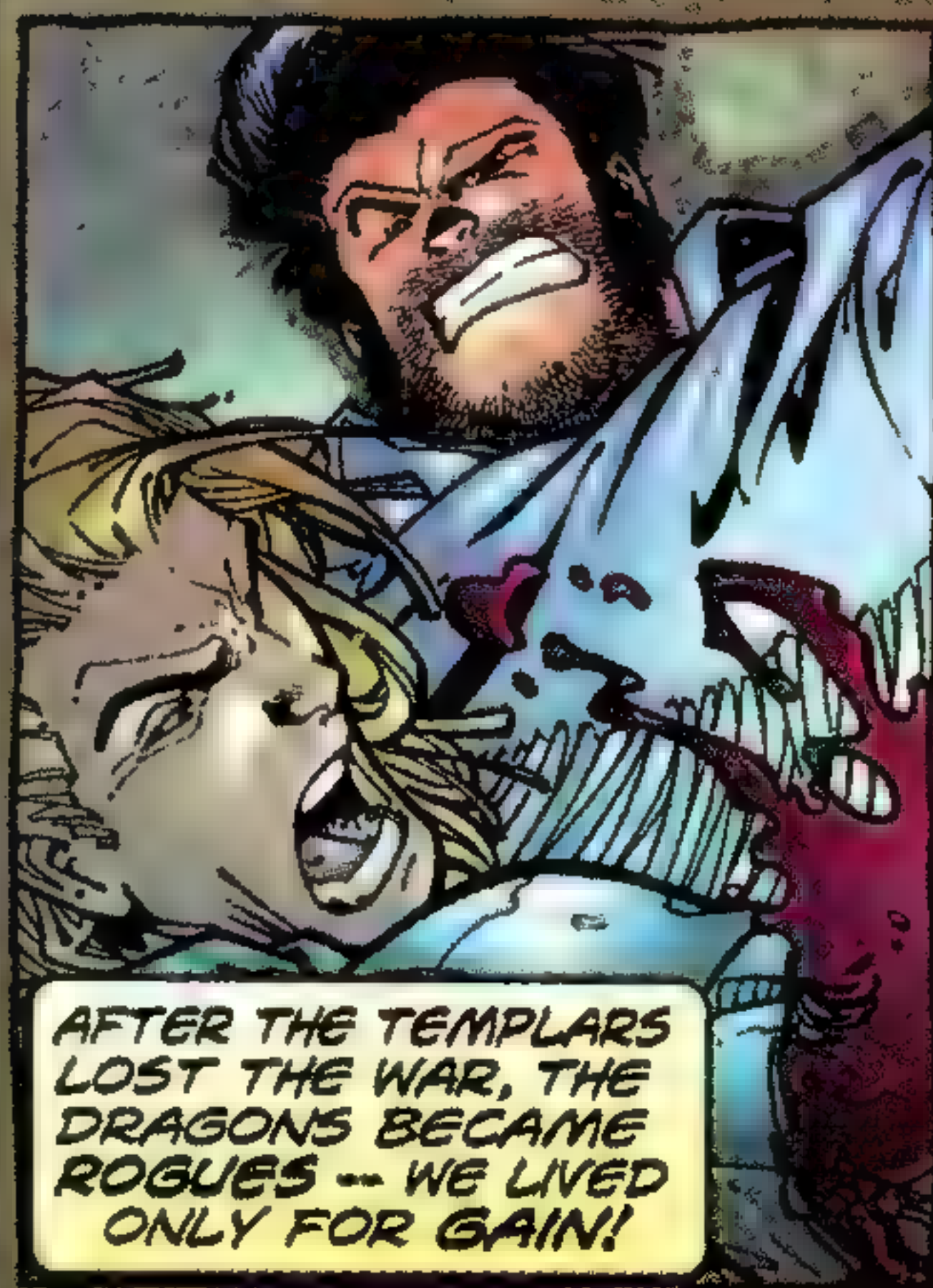
SOMETHING
ABOUT HIM
STRUCK A
CHORD WITHIN
MY HEART.

NONE OF MY FELLOWS SHARED
THAT FEELING, HOWEVER. THE
ATTACK WAS QUICK AND SURGICAL...

... SOON, ALL THE
CREATURES WERE
DEAD, OR DYING...
LEAVING ONLY THE
GENTLE STRANGER
ALIVE.

WE NORMALLY WOULD NOT LEAVE
WITNESSES, BUT EVEN THUGGISH
GUNTHER -- THE DRAGON LEADER --
SENSED THAT THIS MAN WAS...
DIFFERENT.

USEFUL.



AFTER THE TEMPLARS
LOST THE WAR, THE
DRAGONS BECAME
ROGUES -- WE LIVED
ONLY FOR GAIN!



WHEN A DEAL FOR
ANGEL PRODUCT
WENT SERIOUSLY
AWRY, WE WERE
NEARLY
OBLITERATED.*

*SEE CRIMSON #13 - Scott



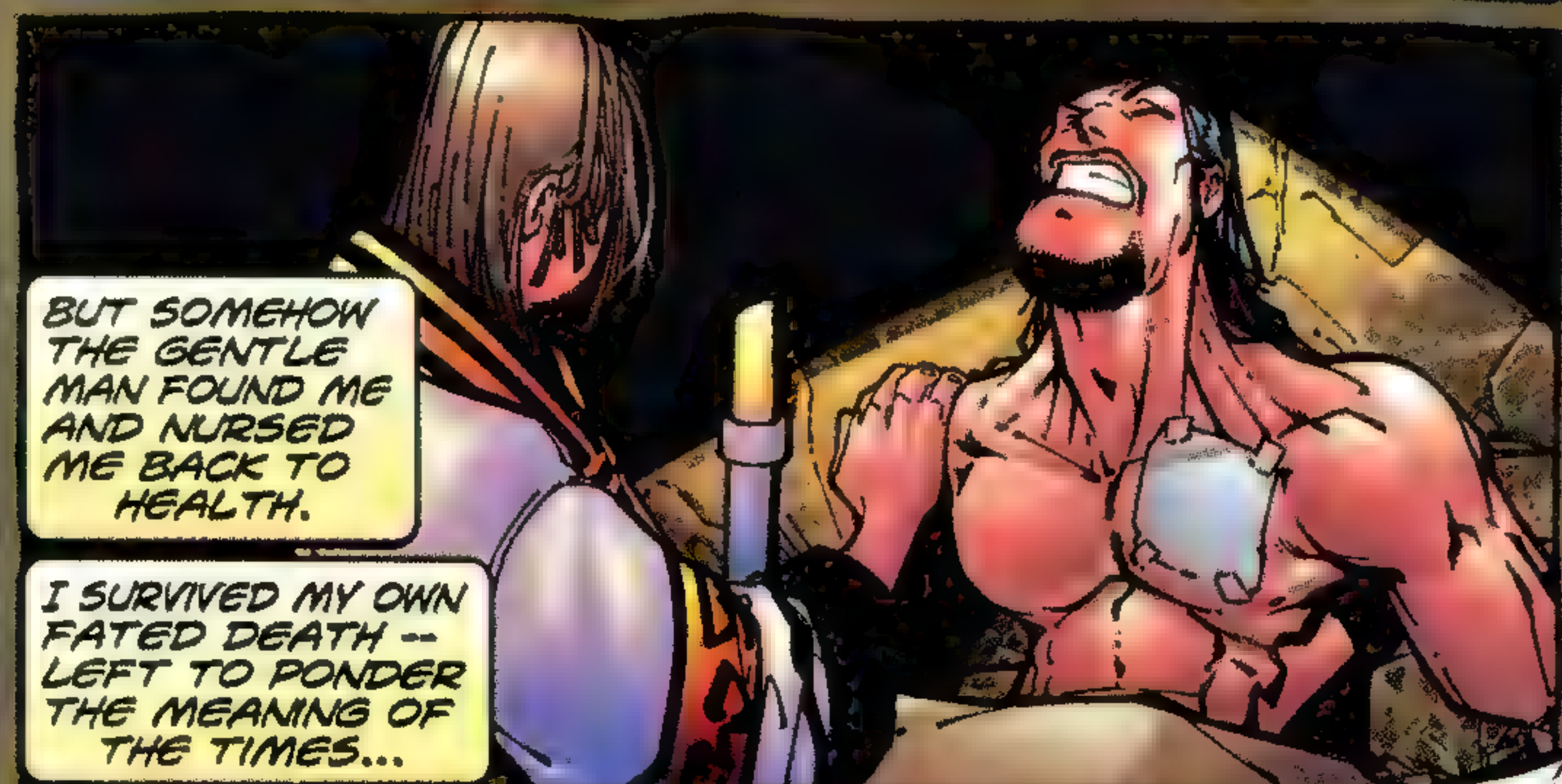
GUNTHER AND ALL
THE REST WERE
SLAUGHTERED,
AND I NEARLY
JOINED THEM...



...BUT I LIVED LONG ENOUGH
TO SEE AN ANGEL KILL A
MAN -- IN THE SIGHT OF A BOY
I RECOGNIZED AS CHOSEN.



THEN EVERYTHING
WENT DARK -- AND I
WAITED FOR DEATH
TO CLAIM ME...



BUT SOMEHOW
THE GENTLE
MAN FOUND ME
AND NURSED
ME BACK TO
HEALTH.

I SURVIVED MY OWN
FATED DEATH --
LEFT TO PONDER
THE MEANING OF
THE TIMES...



...AND GRANTED THE
SURE KNOWLEDGE THAT
THE ANGEL AND THE
CHOSEN ONE WILL PLAY
CRUCIAL PARTS IN THE
COMING END OF DAYS.



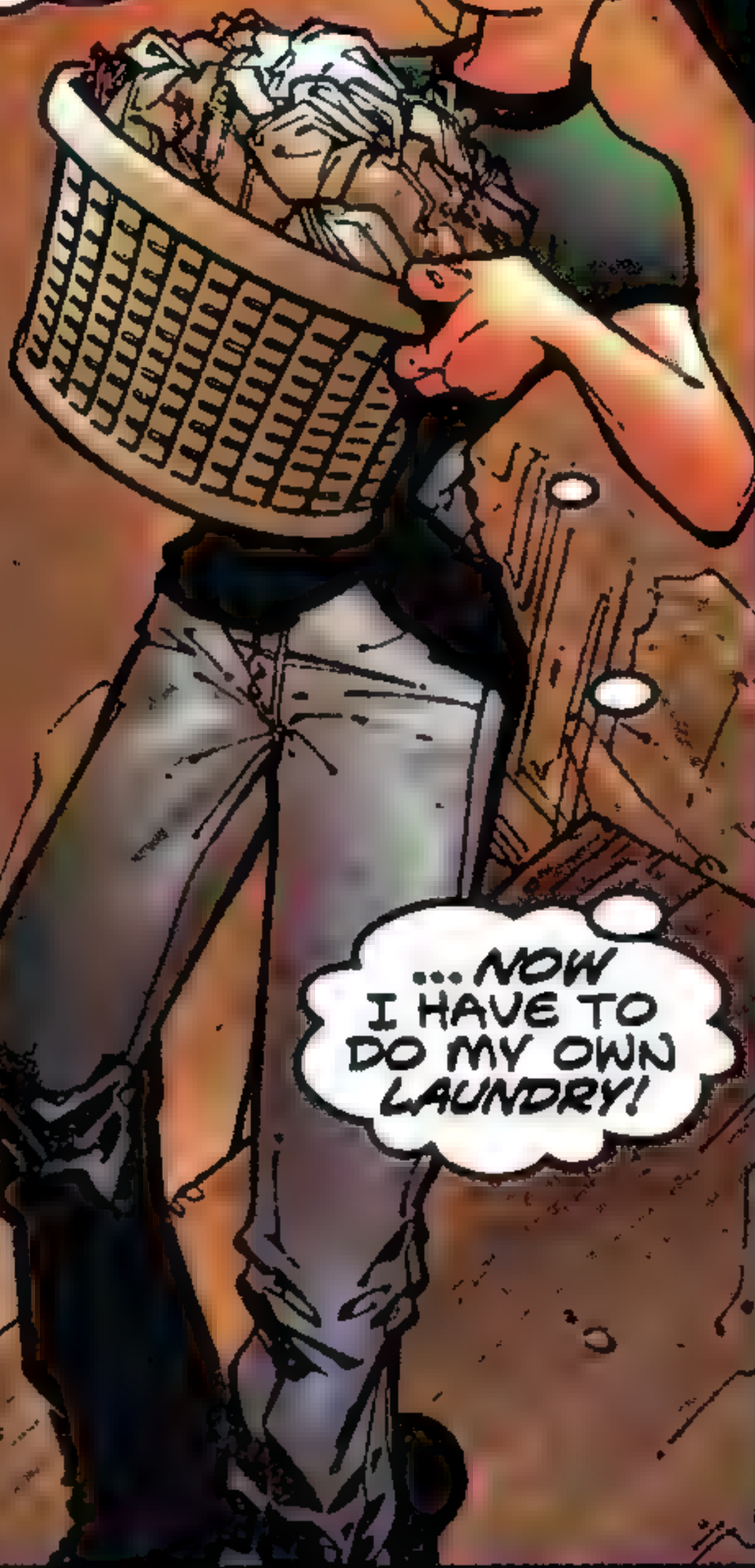
I KNEW THAT I MUST PLAY
MY ROLE AS WELL -- TO
RESTORE FAITH ONCE
AGAIN TO THE PEOPLE --
FOR I AM THE HERALD
OF THE FINAL DAYS...

...AND WITH THE AID OF
ANGEL ZOPHIEL, I MUST
SET DESTINY IN MOTION!

THIS I KNOW BECAUSE
I TOO AM OF THE
CELESTIAL HOST... AND
OUR TIME LOOMS LARGE --!

— SOON EVEN THE EARTH-BOUND ANGELS WILL FLY THE HALLS OF HEAVEN ONCE MORE!

UFF -- ONCE I FLEW EVERYWHERE IN GOD'S REALM WITH THE SPEED OF THOUGHT...



...NOW I HAVE TO DO MY OWN LAUNDRY!

AND I MUST HURRY UP, OR I'M GOING TO BE LATE FOR WORK.

ODD THAT I'VE ARRANGED MY SCHEDULE TO MIRROR ALEX'S VAMPIRIC LIFE -- I SLEEP THROUGH THE DAY, AND VENTURE OUT ONLY AT NIGHT...



...EVEN MORE ODD THAT A FALLEN ANGEL AND A VAMPIRE WOULD BE BEST FRIENDS! OR ARE WE SOMETHING... MORE?



WAIT -- I DIDN'T LEAVE MY APARTMENT DOOR OPEN, DID I?

IT'S TOO EARLY FOR ALEX TO BE HERE...

...COULD JEFF HAVE RETURNED?*

KREEEK

*JEFF WAS THE KIND STRINGER WHO FIRST HELPED ZOPHIE WHEN SHE FELL TO EARTH. HE VANISHED IN ISSUE #11 - Scott

I HAVE HEARD THAT NEW YORK IS CRIME-RIDDEN -- PERHAPS SOME MISCREANT HAS BROKEN IN...! I MUST BE CAUTIOUS...

HELLO -- JEFF --?!



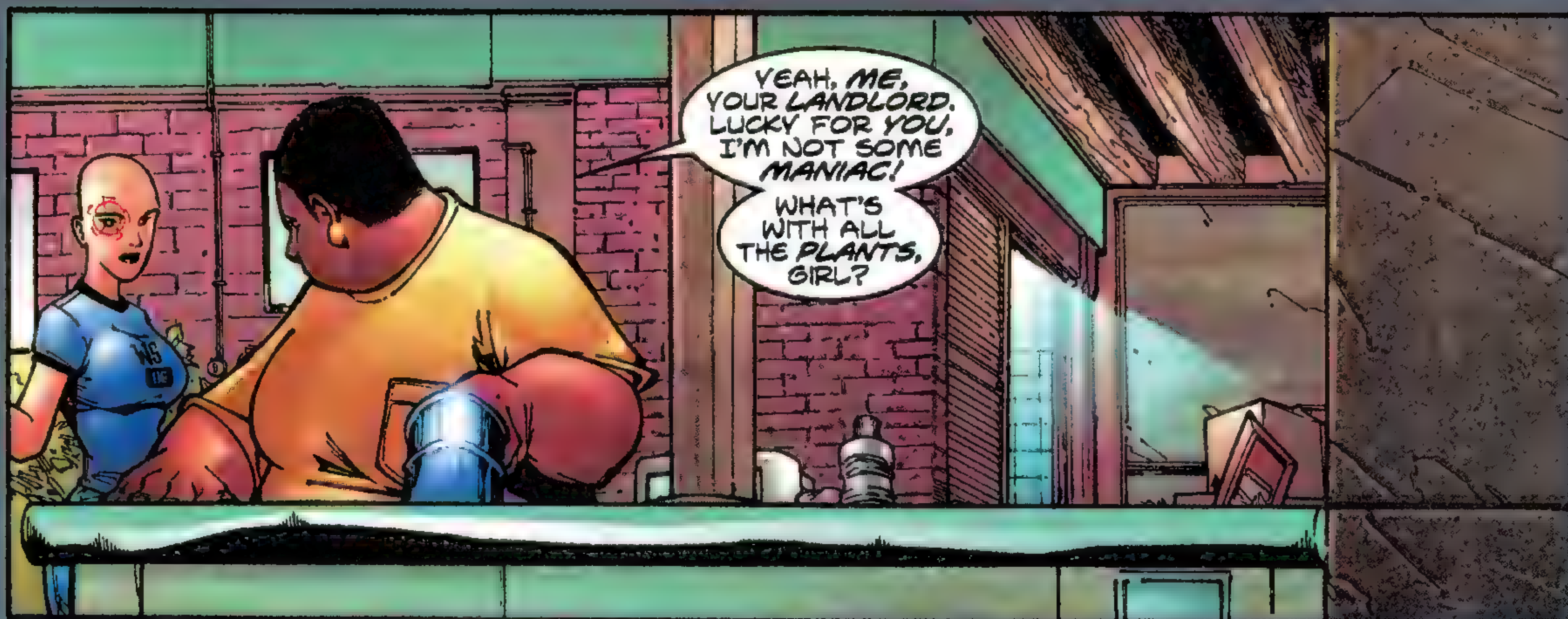
NO ONE...?



SHOULDN'T LEAVE THE DOOR UNLOCKED, MISSY...

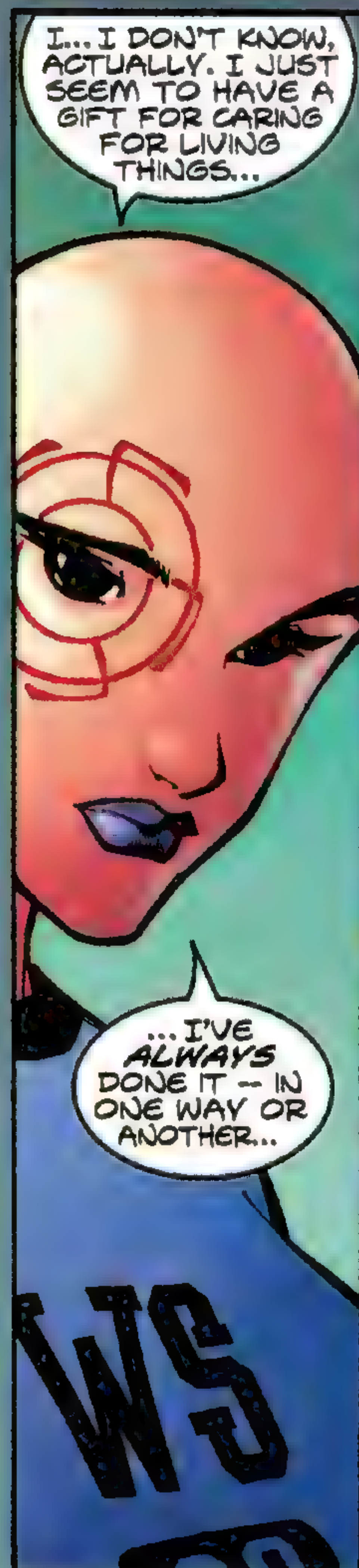
OH --! MISS BISSETTE, IT IS YOU!





YEAH, ME,
YOUR LANDLORD.
LUCKY FOR YOU,
I'M NOT SOME
MANIAC!

WHAT'S
WITH ALL
THE PLANTS,
GIRL?



I... I DON'T KNOW,
ACTUALLY. I JUST
SEEM TO HAVE A
GIFT FOR CARING
FOR LIVING
THINGS...

... I'VE
ALWAYS
DONE IT -- IN
ONE WAY OR
ANOTHER...



YEAH, I
SEE WHAT
YOU TAKE
CARE OF.

I'VE
SEEN THAT
PALE BOY WITH
THE LEATHER
PANTS! HE CAN'T
BE ANY GOOD -- BOY
DRESSES LIKE A ...
VAMPIRE OR
SOMETHING!

NOT LIKE
YOUR COUSIN,
JEFF -- HE WAS
A GOOD BOY.
WHEN'S HE
COMING
BACK?



I... WISH I KNEW, I MISS HIM...
MAYBE HE'S WITH HIS BOSS,
EMMA -- HE ALWAYS HAD A
CRUSH ON HER...

WELL, I HOPE
HE'S SOMEWHERE
GOOD -- HE
DESERVES IT. I'LL
KEEP HIS APARTMENT
FOR ANOTHER
MONTH...



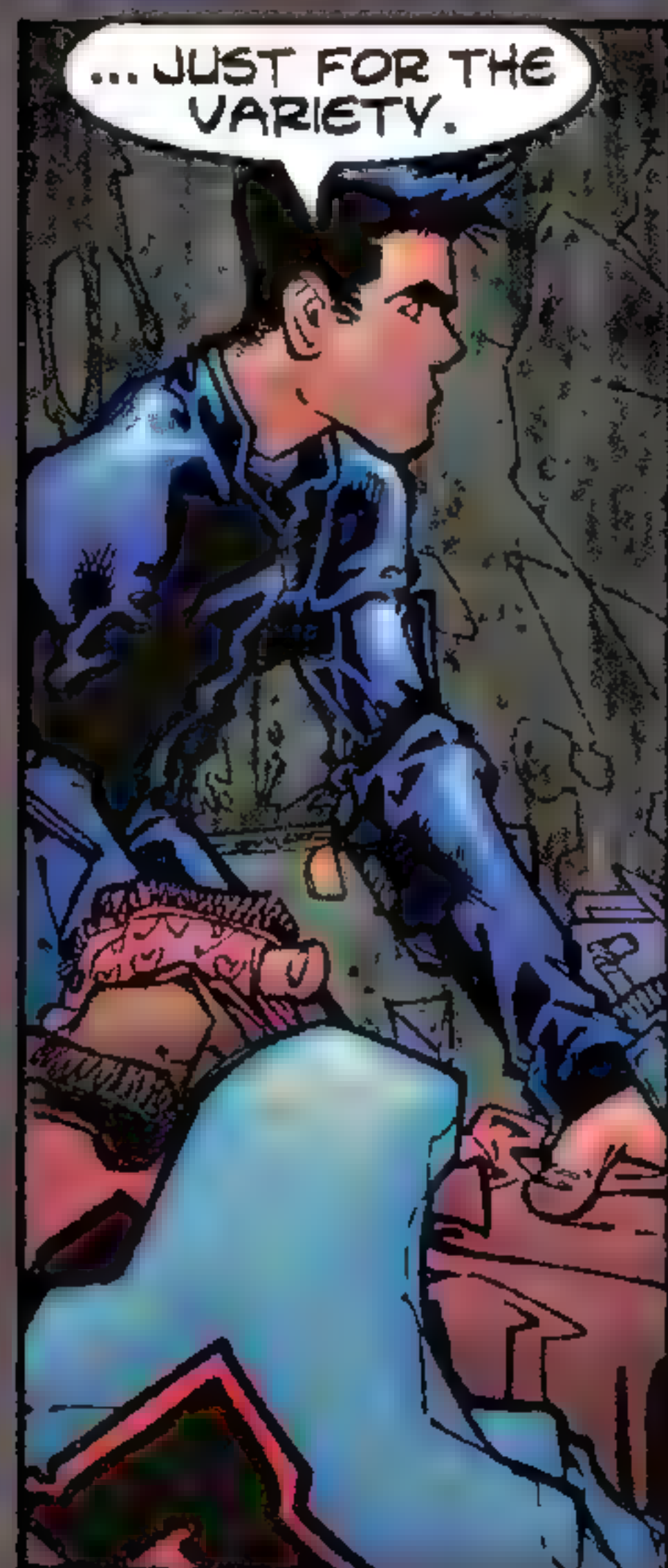
THAT IS
SWEET, MA'AM --
THANK YOU.
JEFF WILL BE SO
THANKFUL
WHEN HE GETS
BACK...



... IF HE EVER
GETS BACK,
I HAVE A VERY
BAD FEELING
ABOUT POOR
JEFF...



... BUT AN
EVEN WORSE
FEELING ABOUT
MY JOB! I'M
GOING TO BE
SO LATE!





IF YOU'RE AFRAID
OF VAN FLEET,
JUST SAY
SO!

NOT
AFRAID... JUST NOT
INTERESTED.



WELL, THIS
IS PRETTY
DISGUSTING!
YOU'RE JEALOUS
OF ZOPHIE AND
ANGRY AT ME FOR
LIMITING HOW
YOU FEED...

...SO YOU'RE
GOING TO
HANG ME OUT
TO DRY WHEN I
NEED YOU THE
MOST...?

FINE!
BE A COWARD,
I DON'T CARE...!



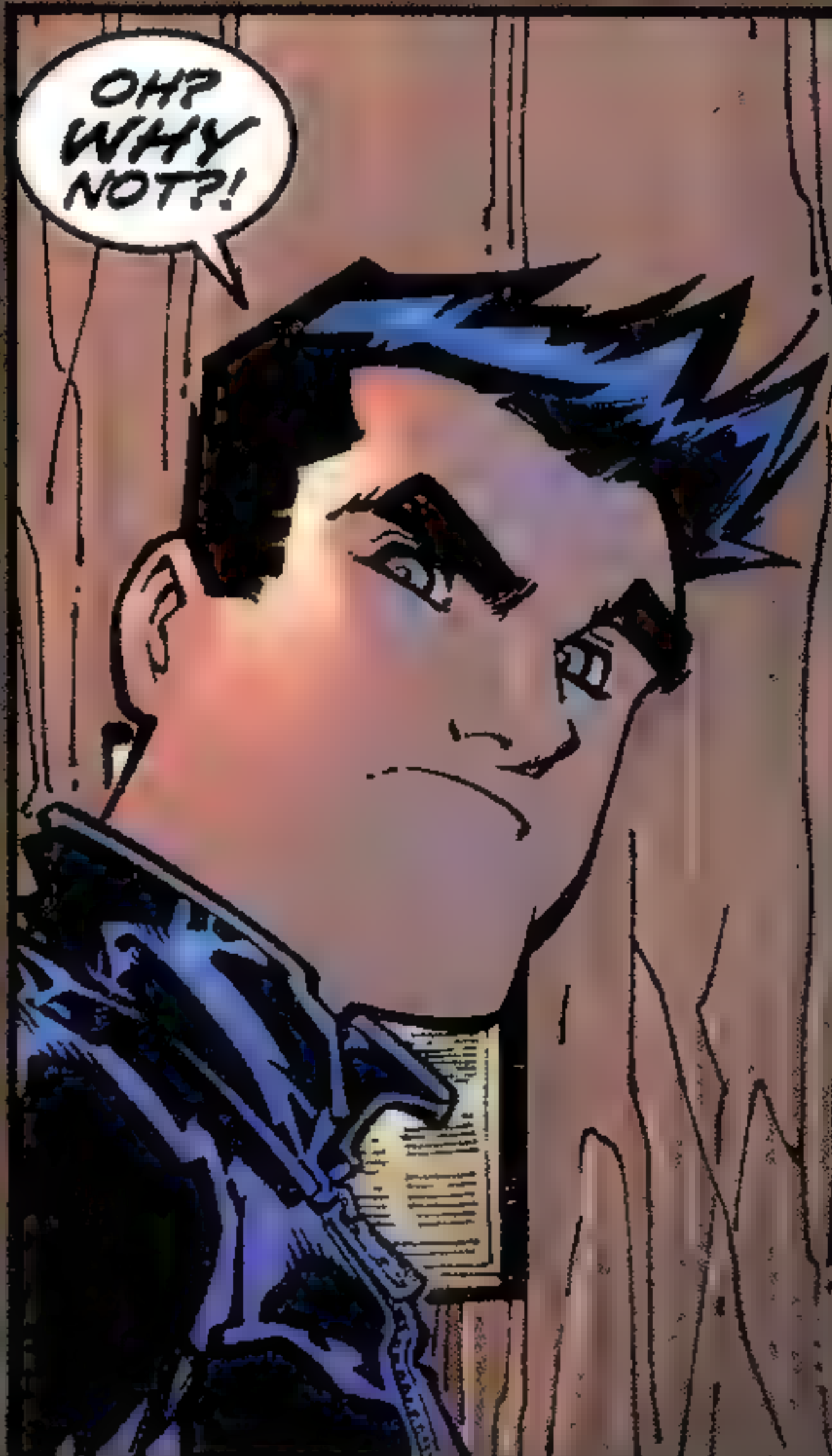
I'M GOING TO GO
DEAL WITH THIS
MONSTER...



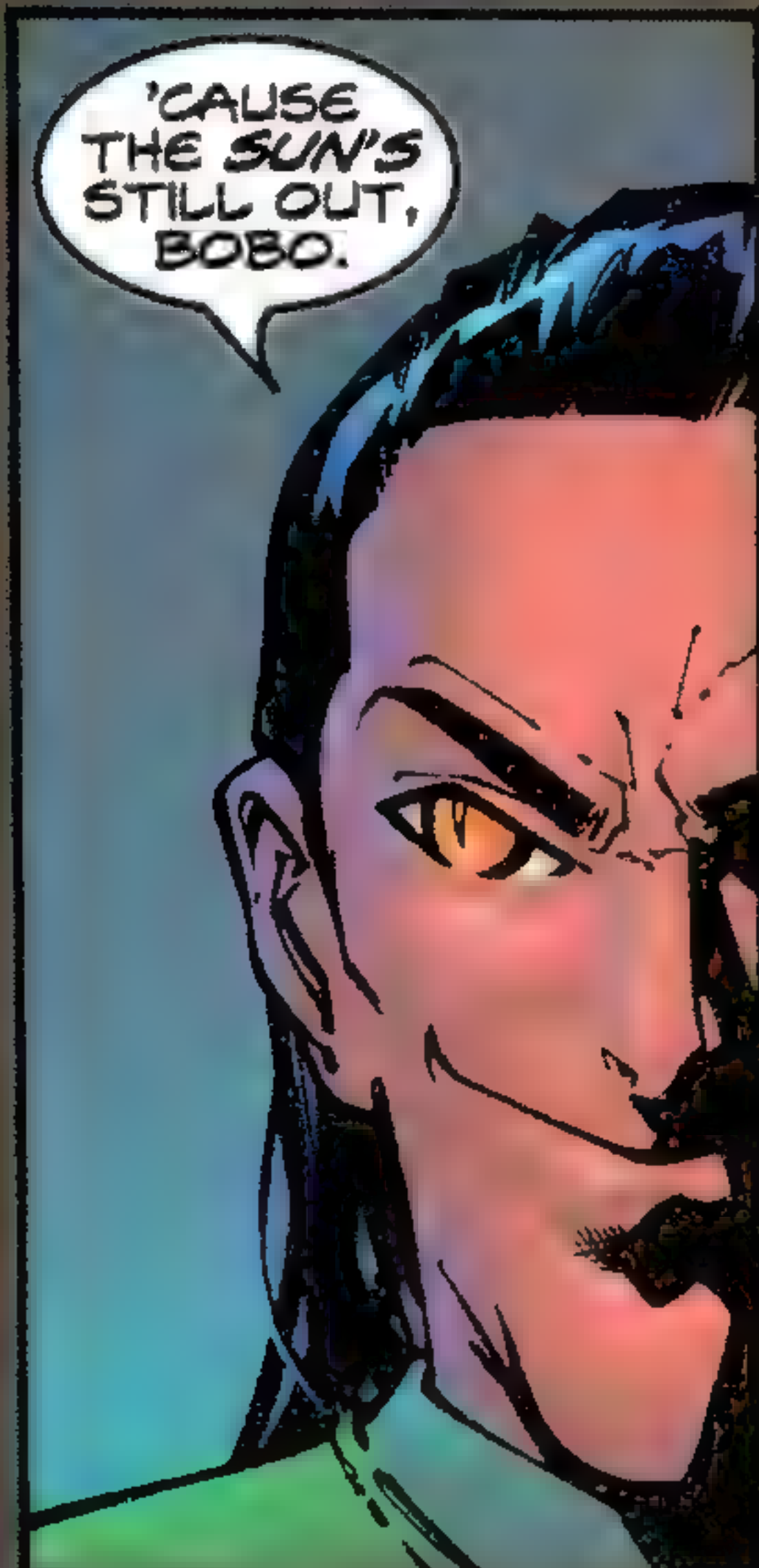
...WITH
YOU, OR
WITHOUT!



NO
YOU'RE
NOT.



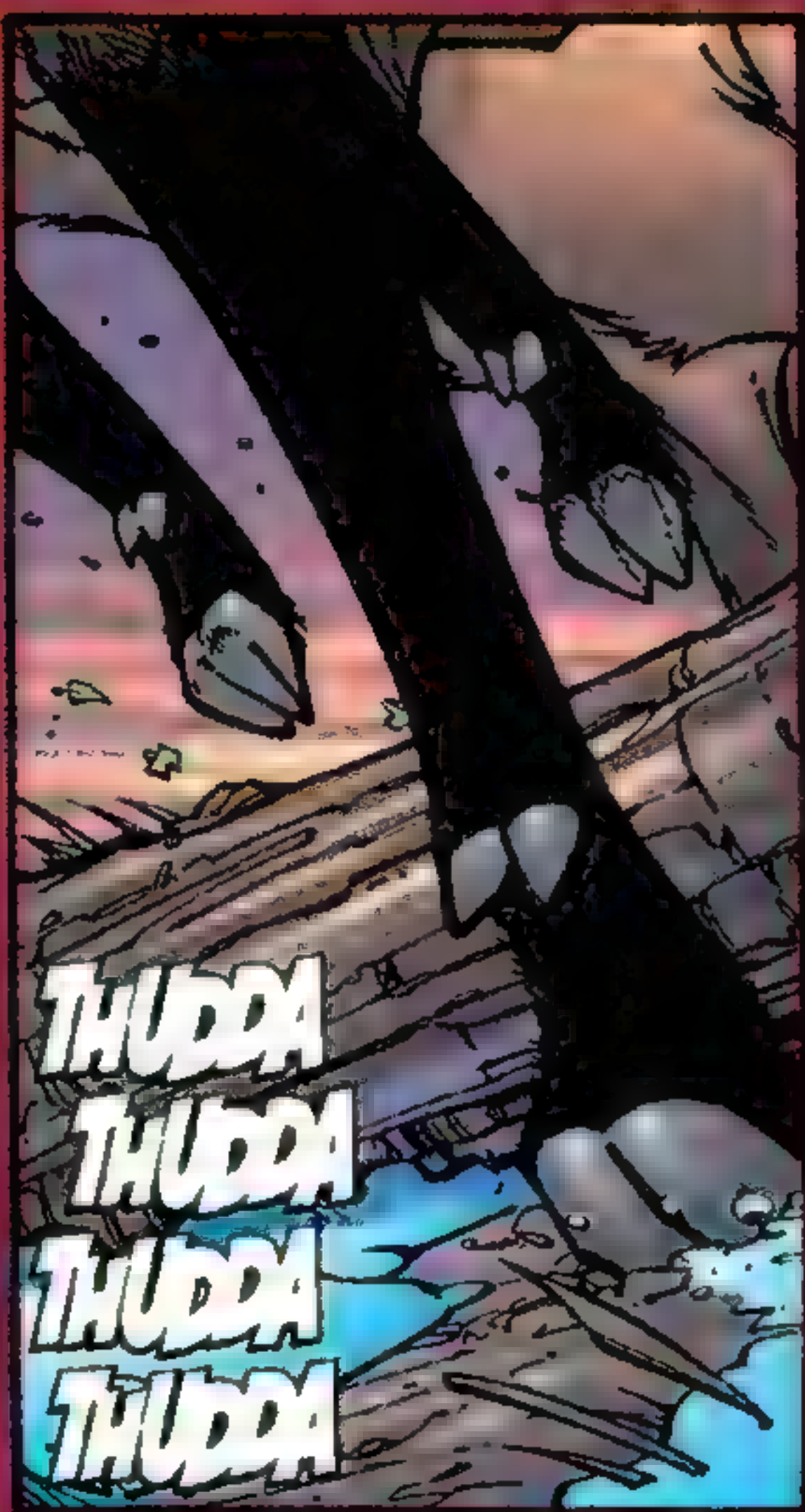
OH?
WHY
NOT?!



'CAUSE
THE SUN'S
STILL OUT,
BOBO.



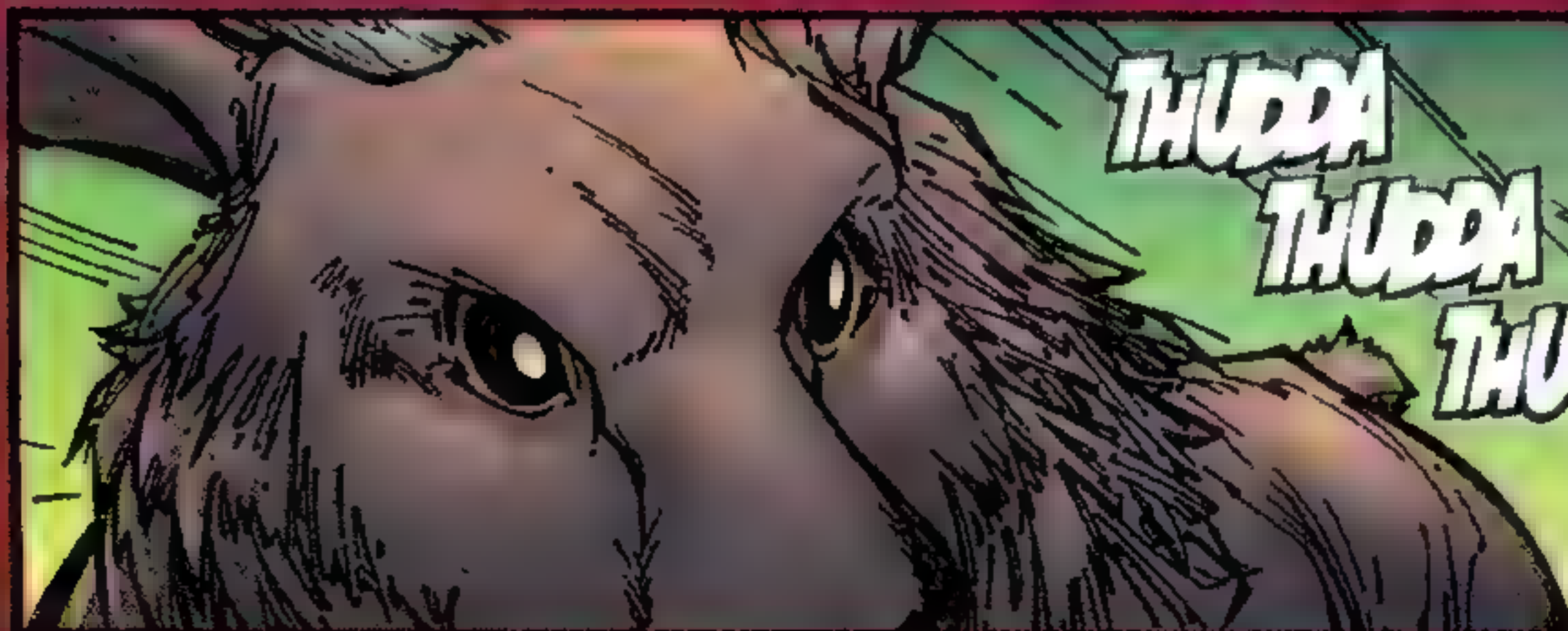
NORTHERN
MAINE.
TWILIGHT.



THUDDA
THUDDA
THUDDA
THUDDA

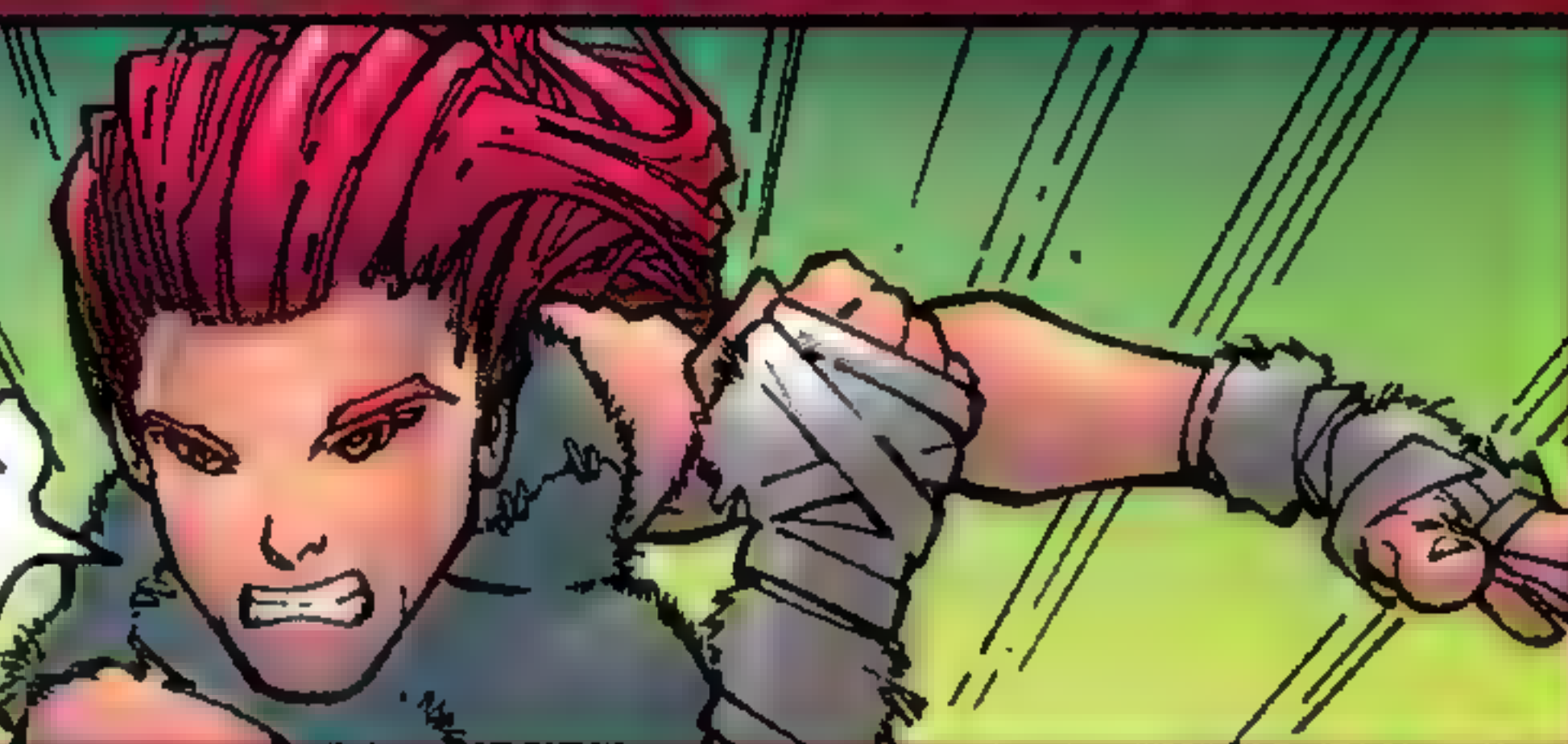


THUDDA THUDDA THUDDA



THUDDA
THUDDA
THUDDA

HAHHH...
HAHHH...
HUH...E



GOT...
YOU...!

KRAK

RAA
AHHH



HA-
YEEE!

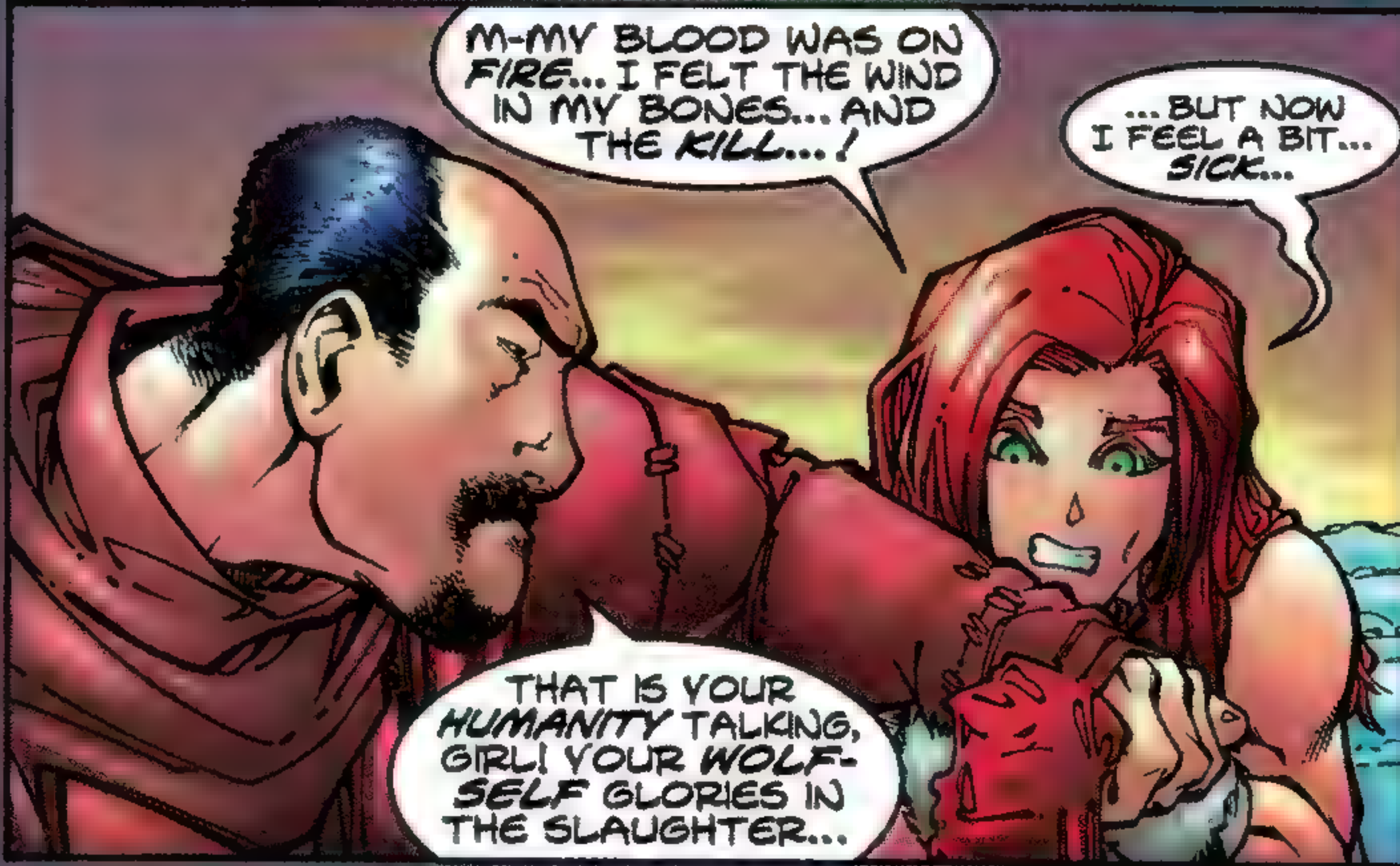


HAV!
OOOOO!



SO, SCARLET THIBAUT, YOU EXULT IN YOUR KILL, EH? GOOD.

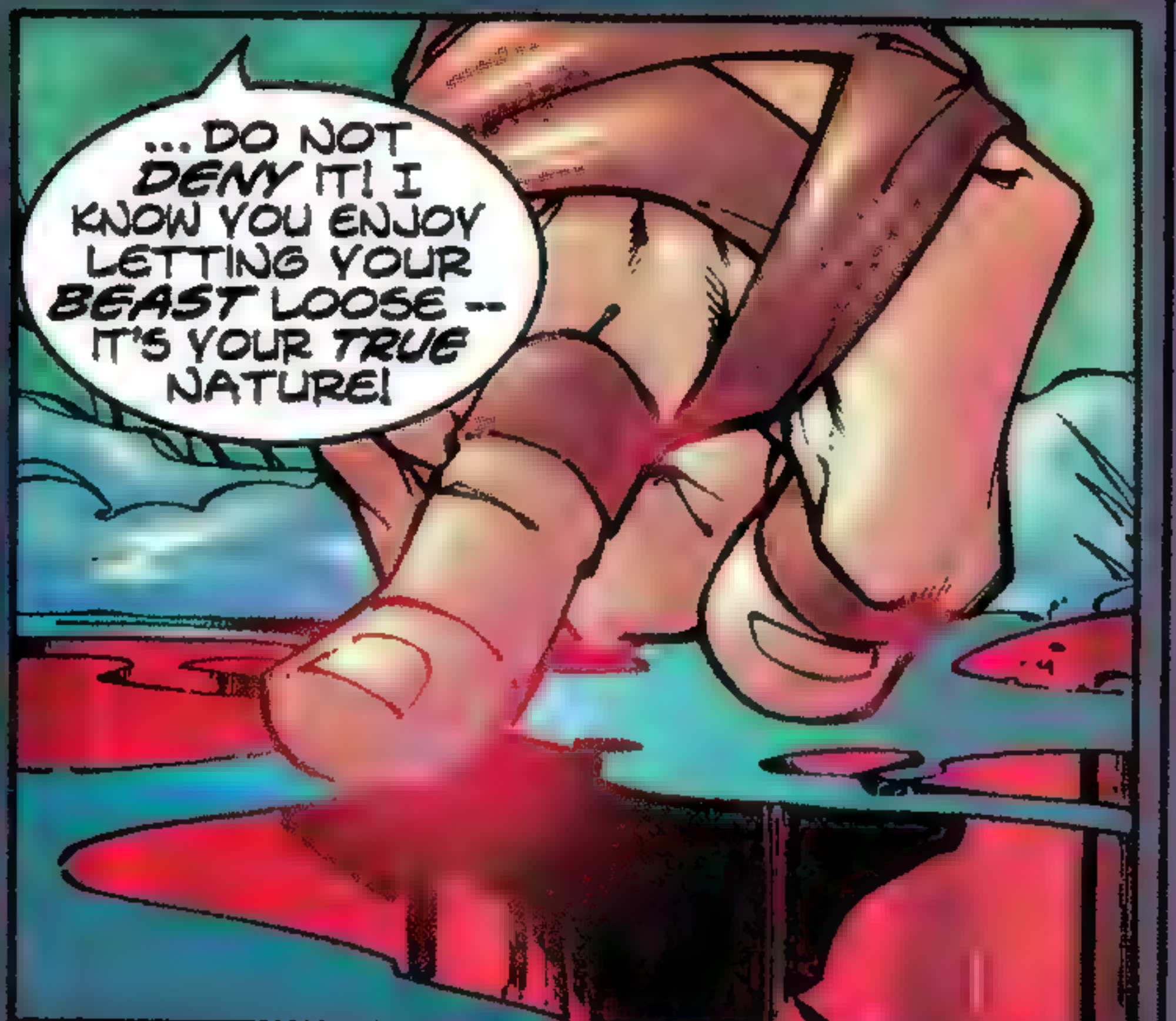
EH...? DUMAS...?



M-MY BLOOD WAS ON FIRE... I FELT THE WIND IN MY BONES... AND THE KILL...!

... BUT NOW I FEEL A BIT... SICK...

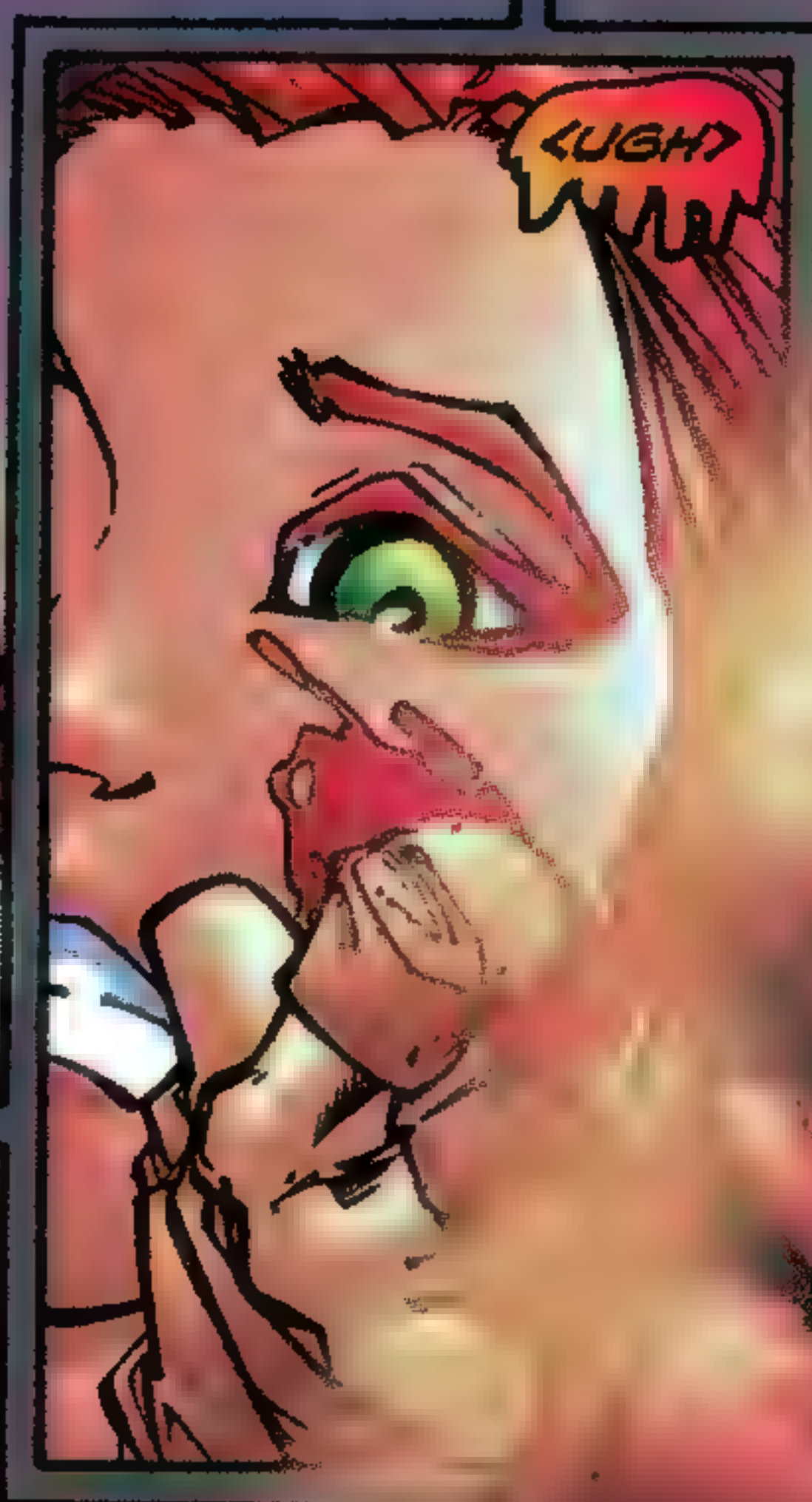
THAT IS YOUR HUMANITY TALKING, GIRL! YOUR WOLF-Self GLORIES IN THE SLAUGHTER...



... DO NOT DENY IT! I KNOW YOU ENJOY LETTING YOUR BEAST LOOSE -- IT'S YOUR TRUE NATURE!



NATURE KNOWS NO MORALITY -- ONLY SURVIVAL! EMBRACE YOUR INSTINCTS -- GIVE THEM FREE REIGN!



UGH?

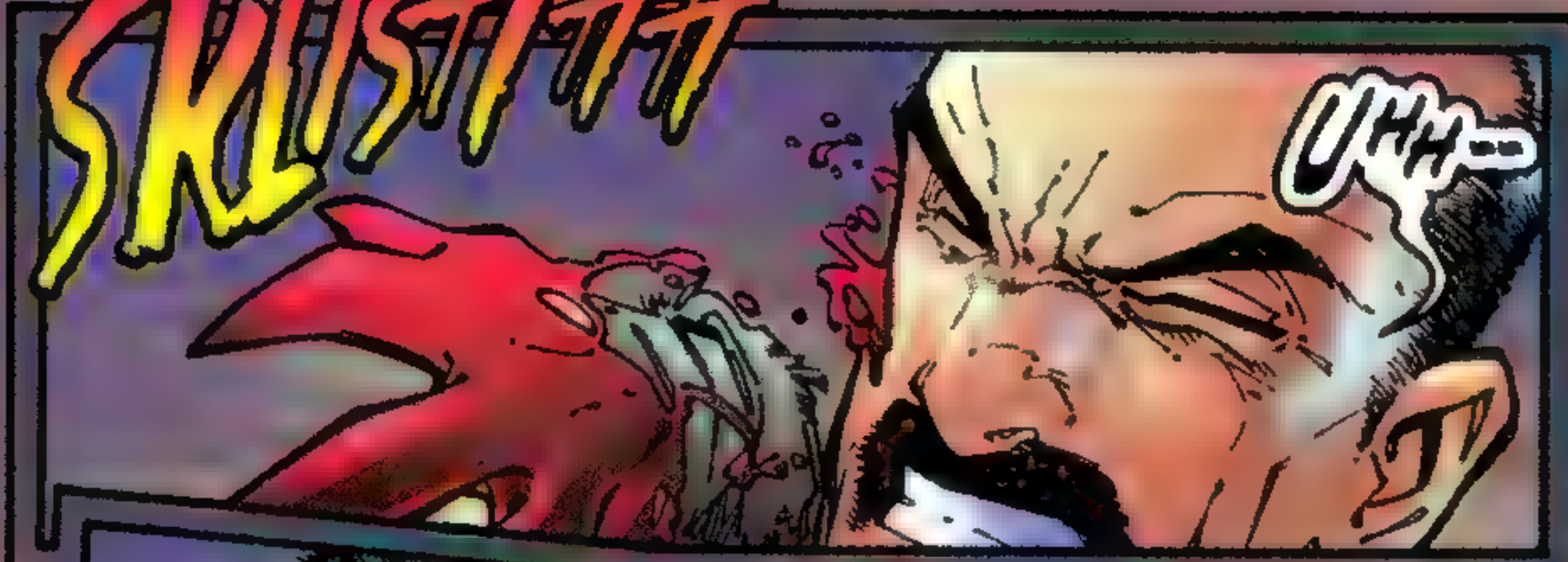
OHH --!

DON'T EVER TOUCH ME WITHOUT PERMISSION, DOG!

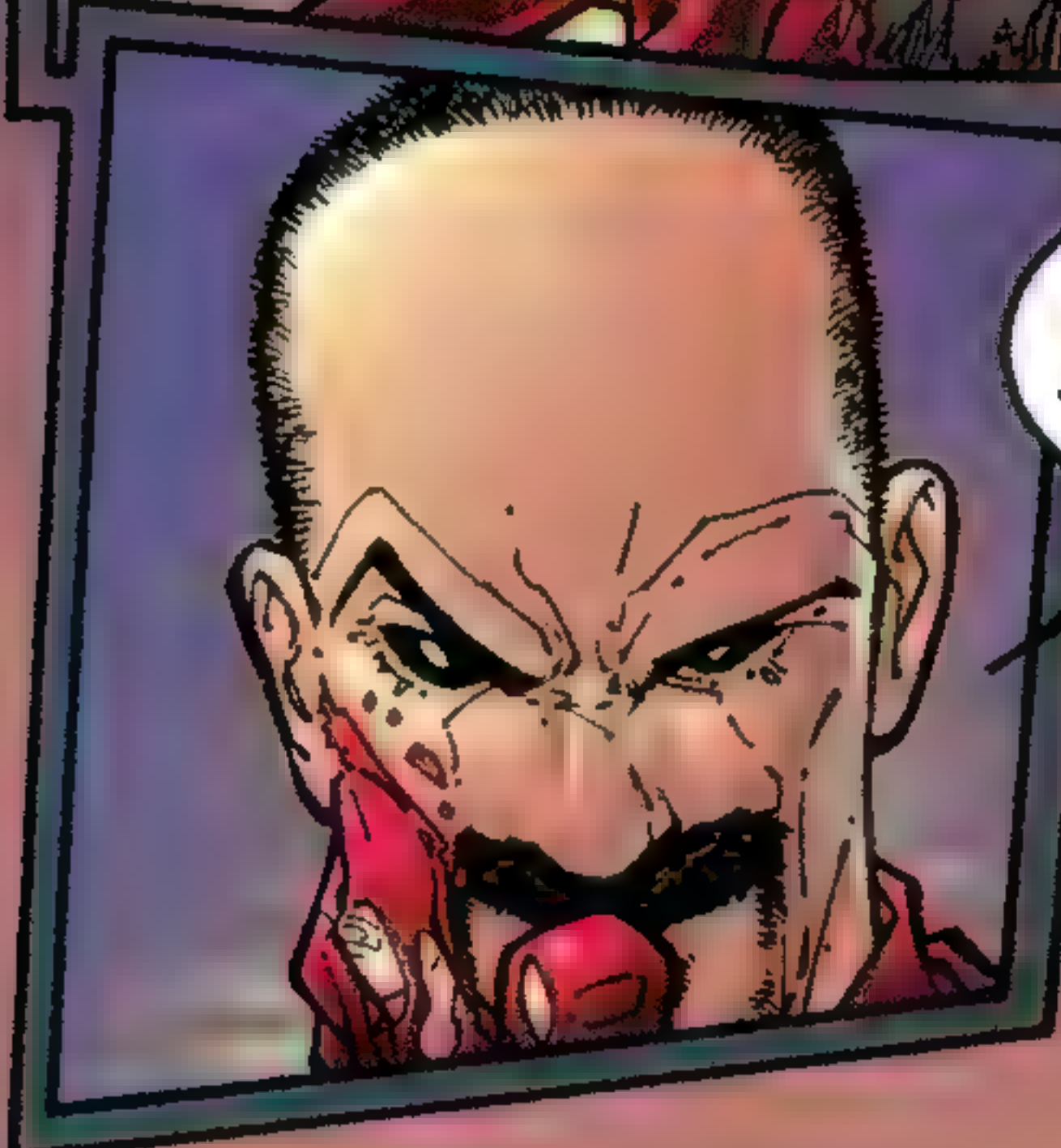


THUNDER

SKLISHHHH



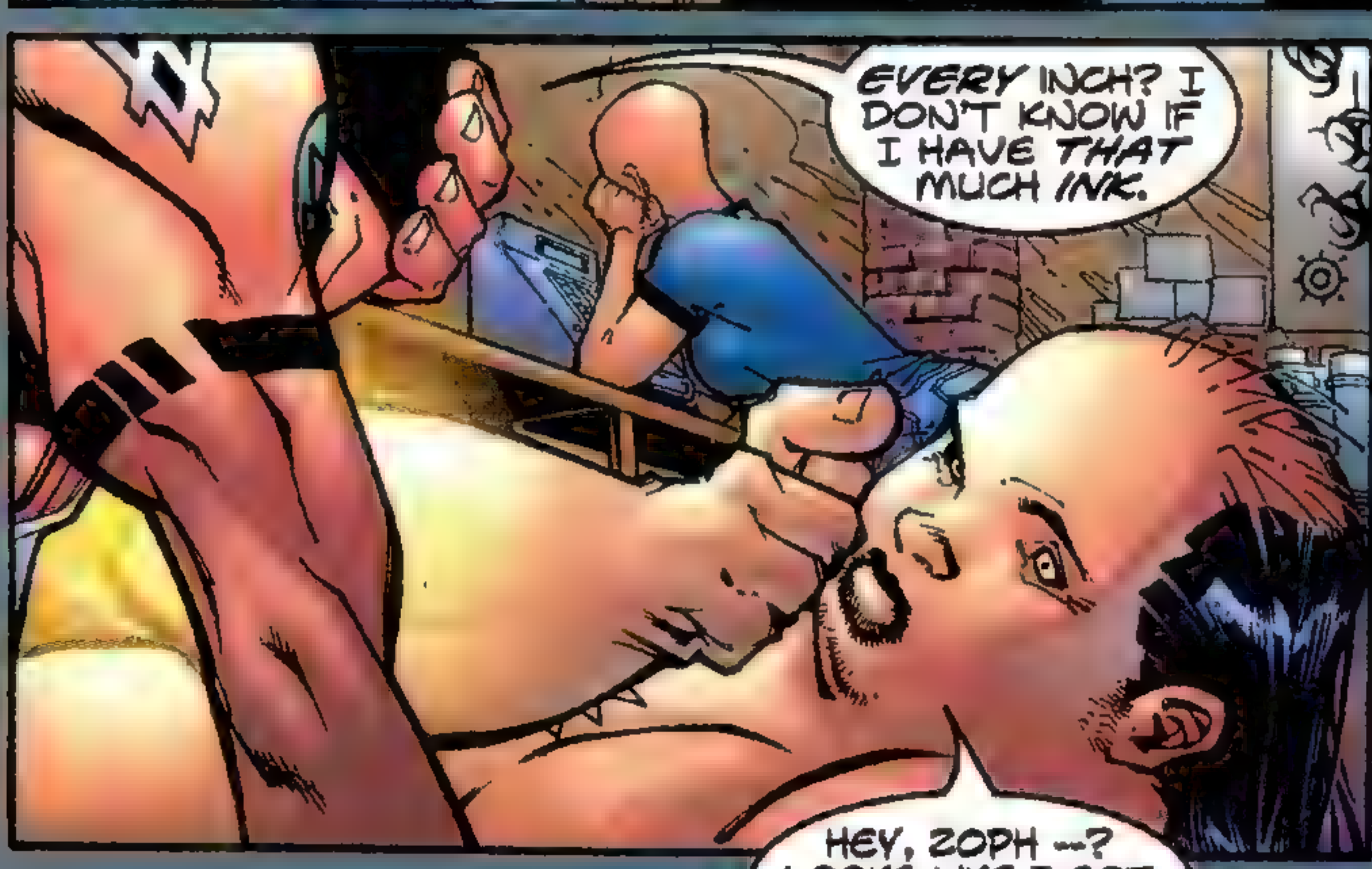
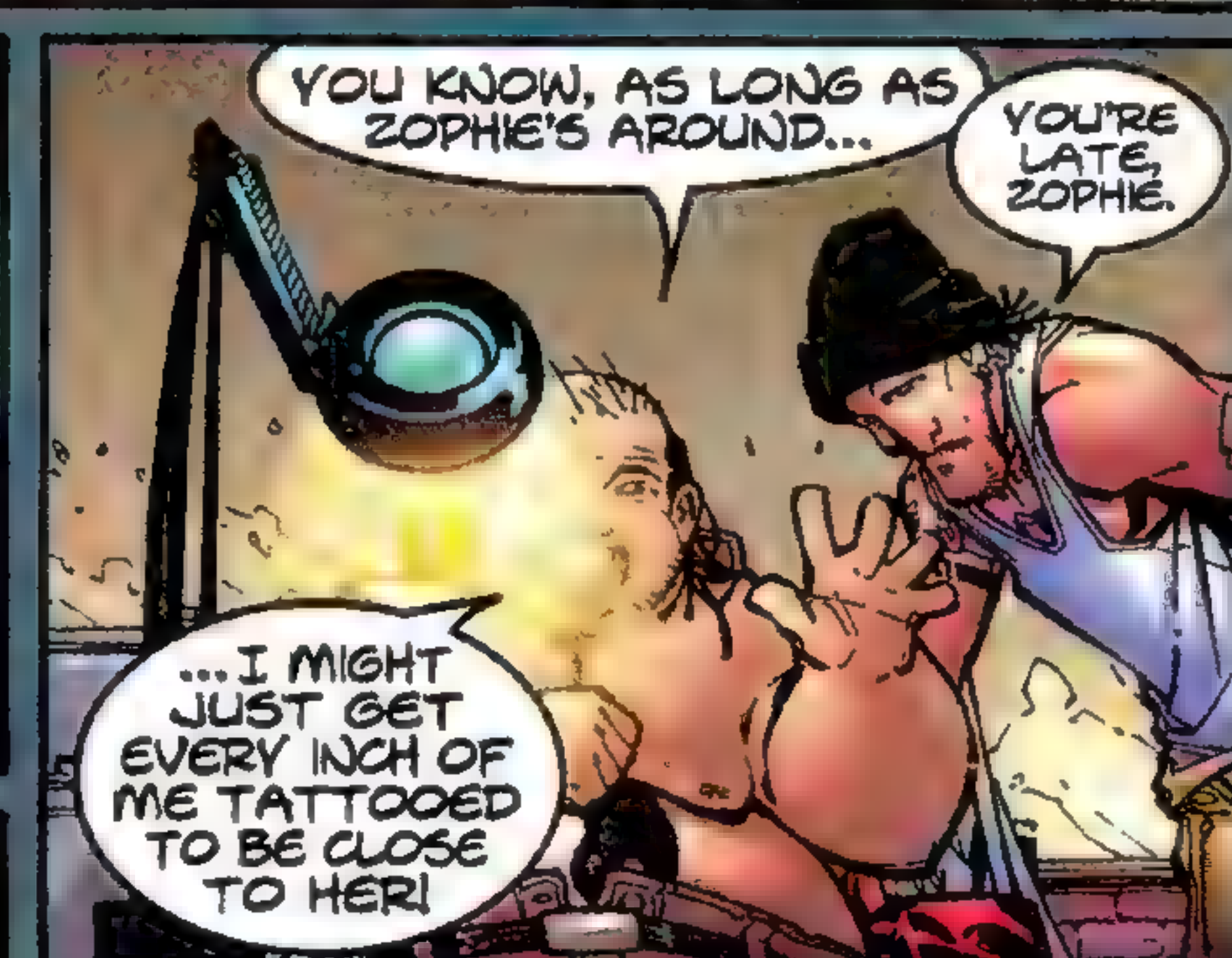
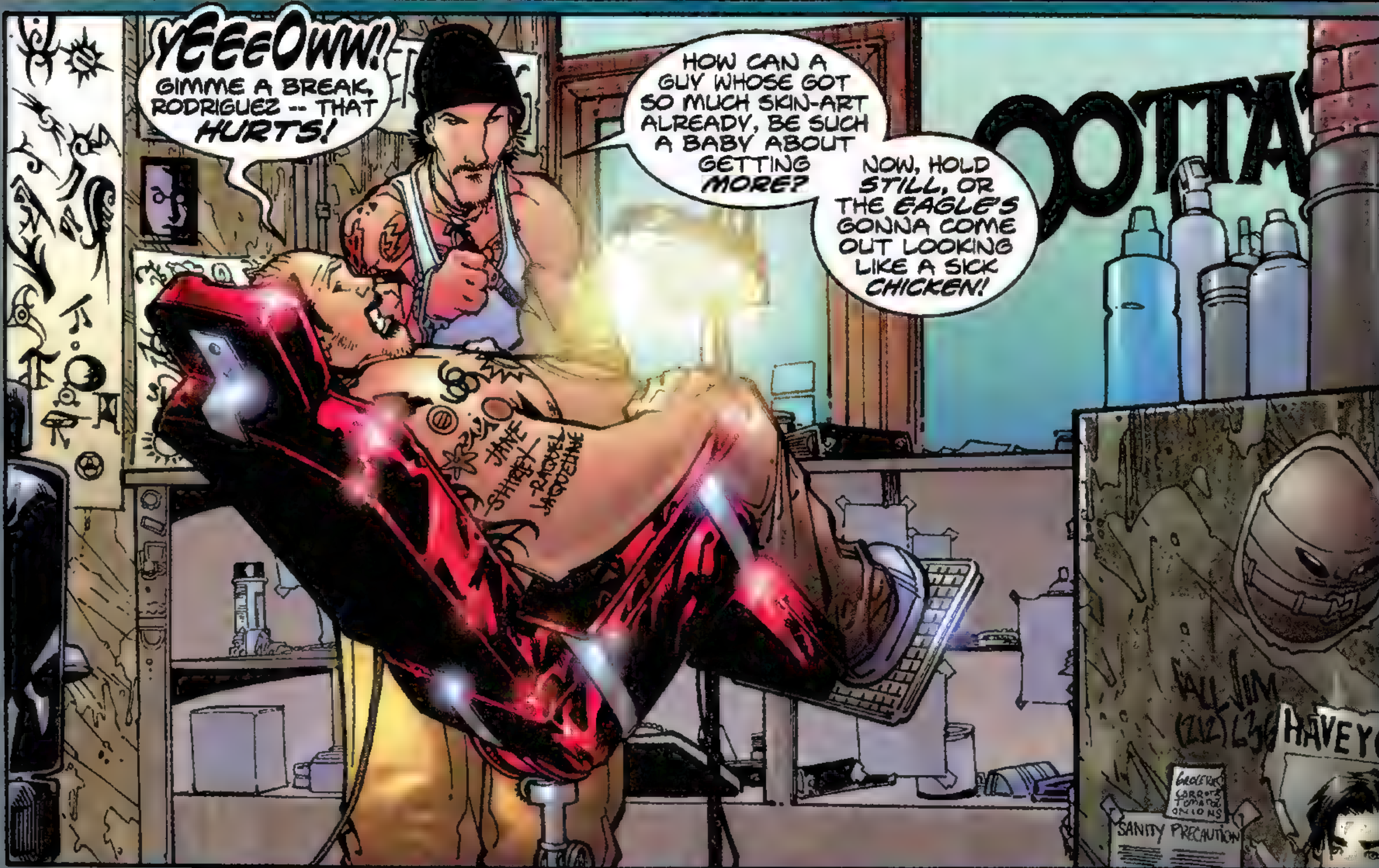
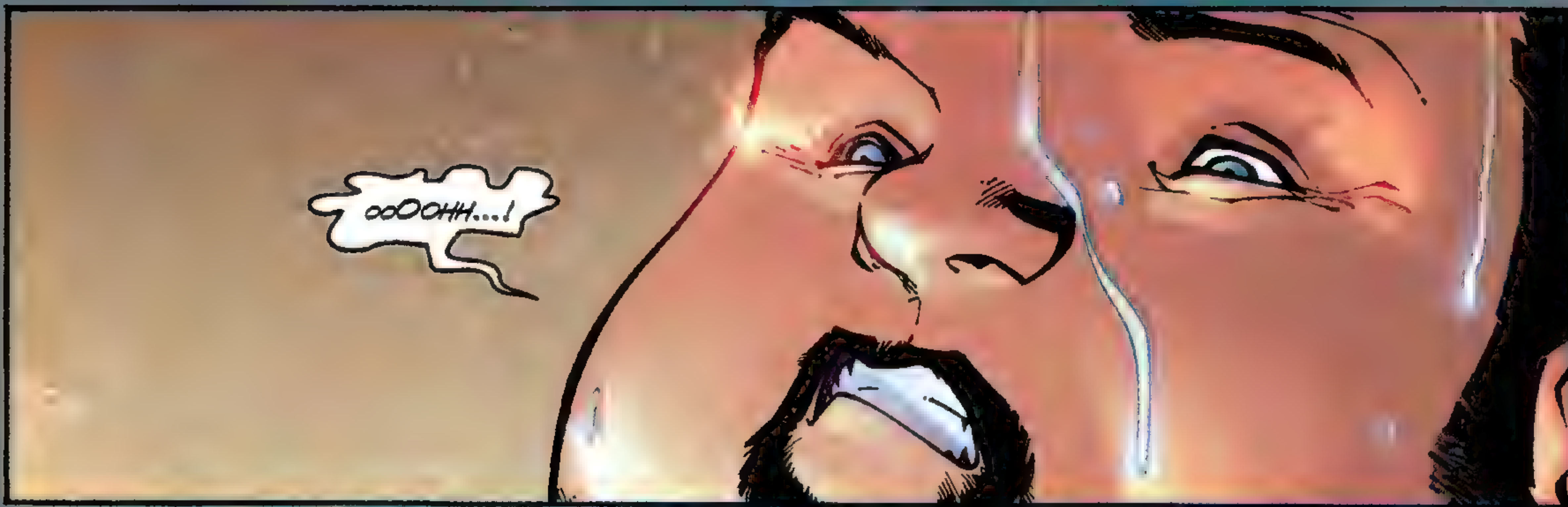
OHH--

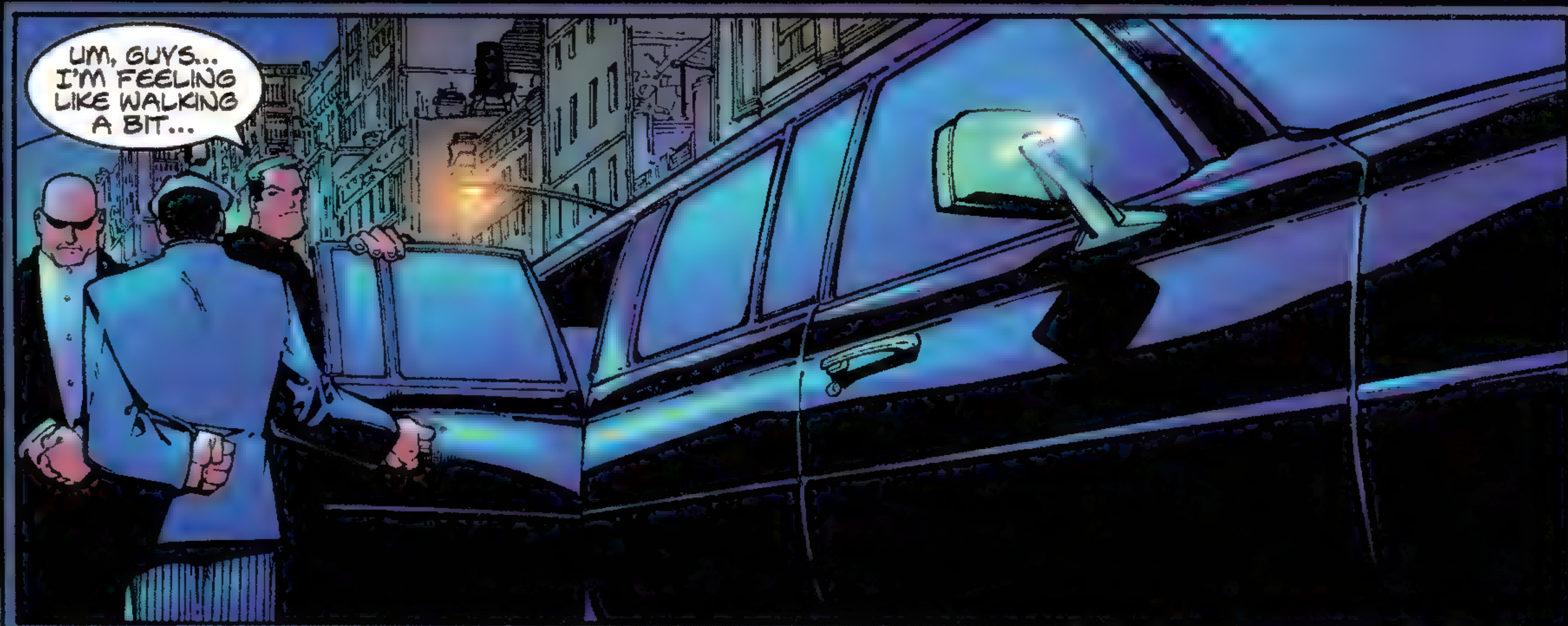


SHARP CLAWS... YOU LEARN FAST, LITTLE ONE --



MPHHH



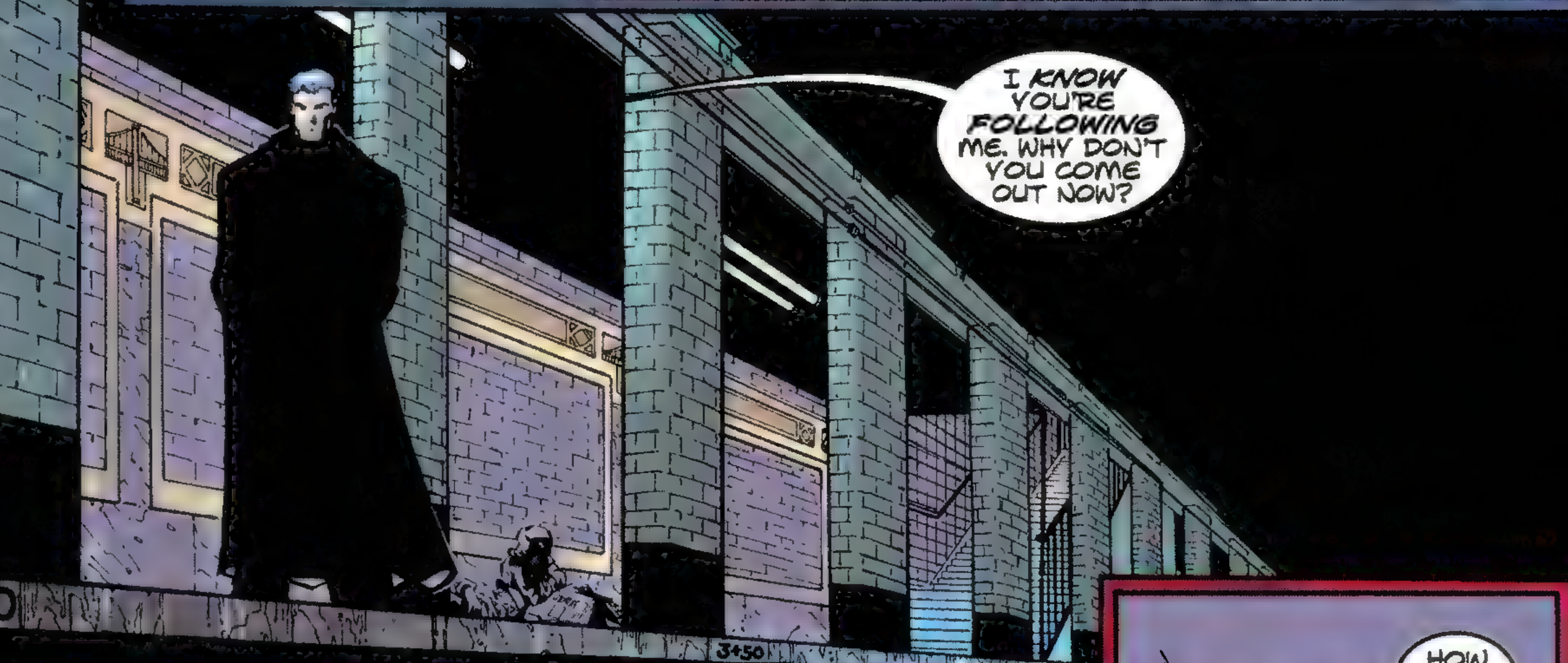


UM, GUYS...
I'M FEELING
LIKE WALKING
A BIT...



...I'LL
MEET YOU
AT HOME --
THAT'S AN
ORDER.

MAYBE I'LL
EVEN GO FOR
A RIDE... LIKE A
NORMAL NEW
YORKER.



I KNOW
YOU'RE
FOLLOWING
ME. WHY DON'T
YOU COME
OUT NOW?

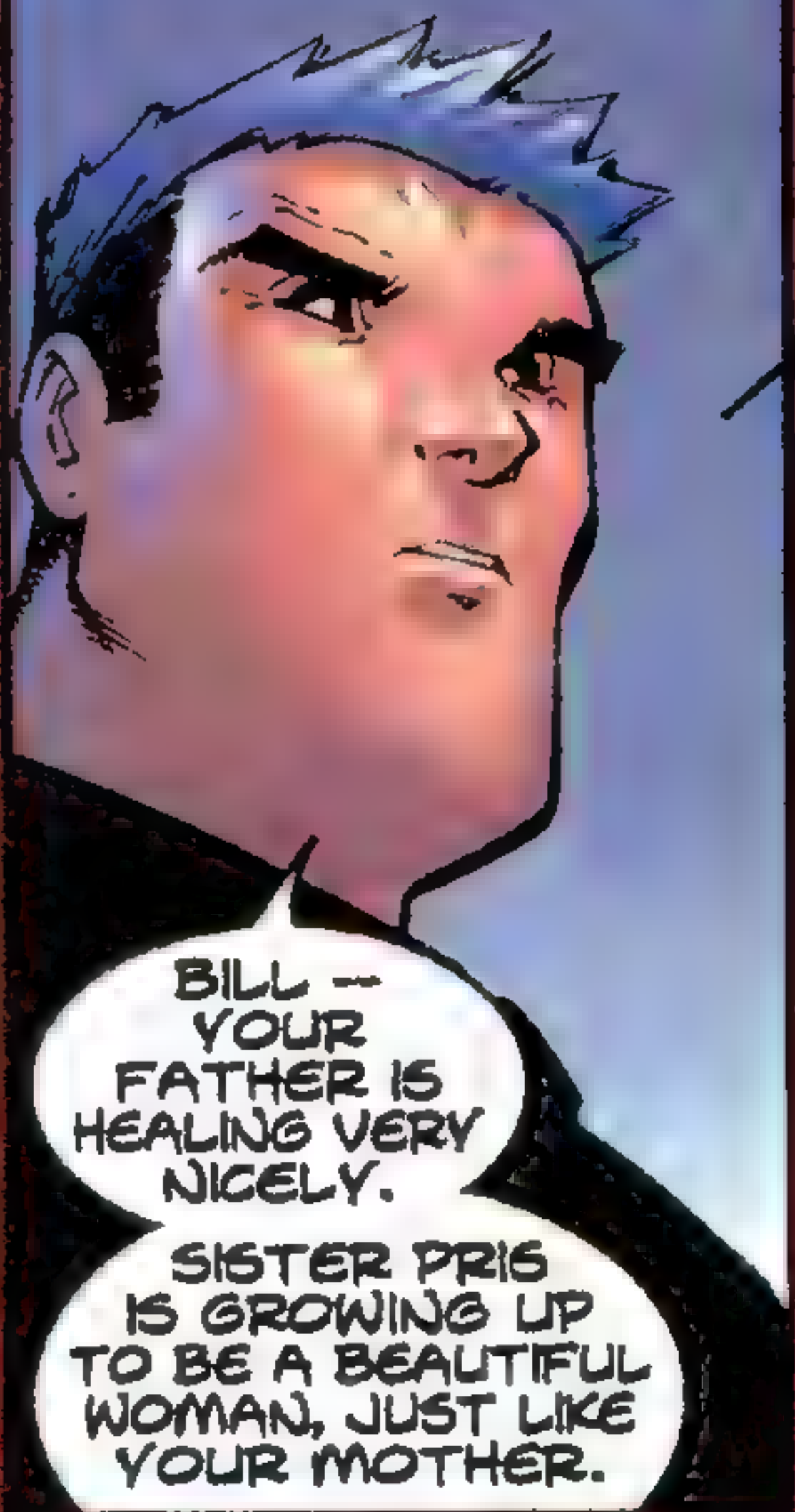


WELL...
WHAT DO
YOU WANT,
ALEX?

UM...



HOW
ARE
THEY?



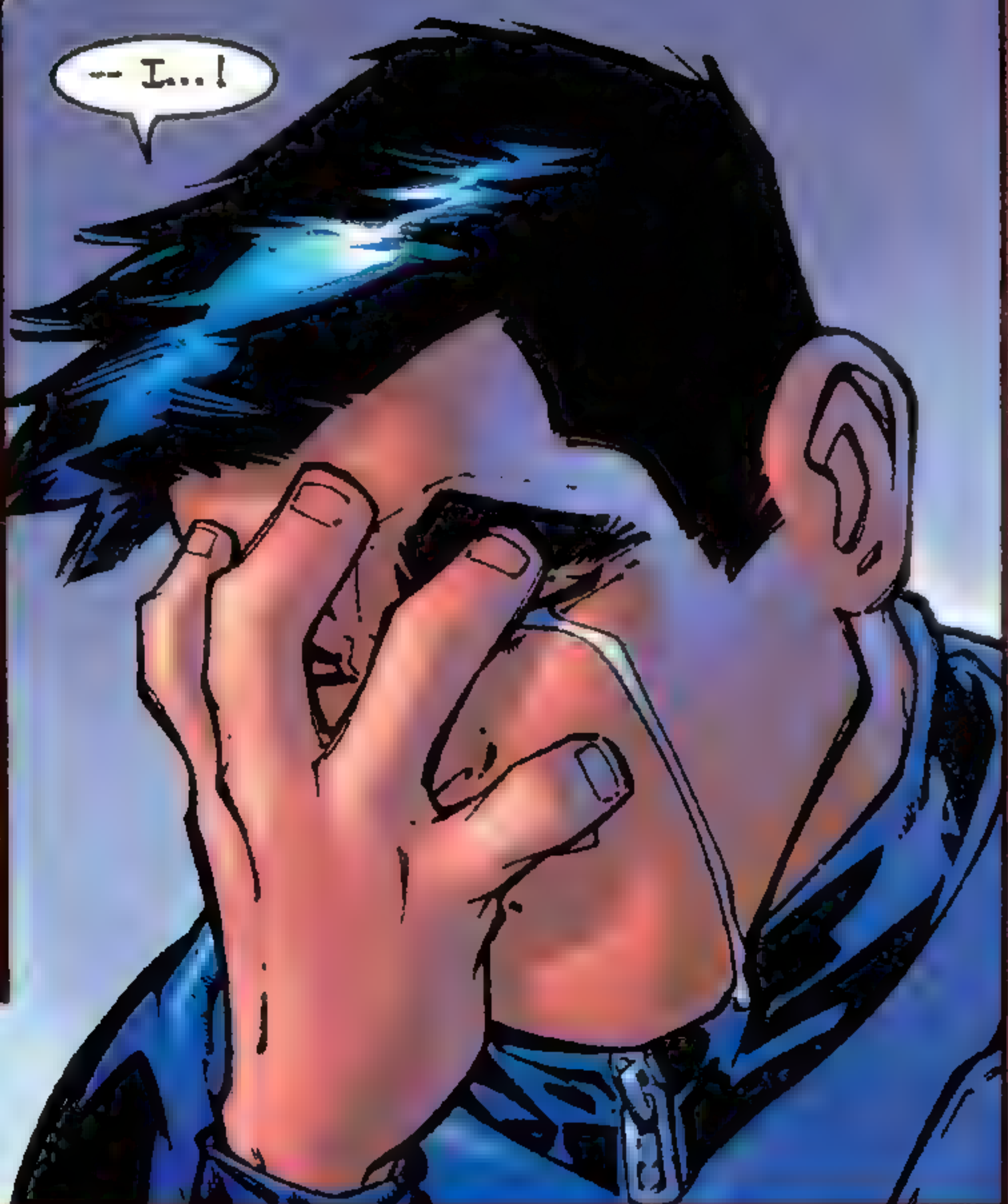
BILL --
YOUR
FATHER IS
HEALING VERY
NICELY.

SISTER PRIS
IS GROWING UP
TO BE A BEAUTIFUL
WOMAN, JUST LIKE
YOUR MOTHER.



MOM IS ONLY
OKAY, THOUGH.
SHE STILL SEEMS
TO BE GRIEVING...
OVER LOSING
YOU.

YOU'D
BETTER
NEVER HURT
THEM, VAN
FLEET...
I...



-- I...!



I THINK YOU
KNOW HOW THAT
IS, DON'T YOU,
BOY? YOU'RE MORE
LIKE YOUR DAD
THAN YOU
KNOW.

STAY BACK,
MONSTER.



WHY WOULD I HURT
YOUR FAMILY, ALEX?
I ADMIRE THEM --
REALLY.

TRUE, I ONCE
CONSIDERED GIVING
YOUR FATHER THE
GIFT, BUT I REALIZED
THAT HIS STRONG MORAL
SENSE WOULD MAKE
HIM A TERRIBLE
VAMPIRE...



BELIEVE ME,
ALEX... I DO LIKE
YOU AND YOUR
FAMILY...



...OR I'D HAVE
FINISHED YOU
ALL LONG
AGO!

I USED TO THINK YOU WERE A FRIEND, TOO. YOU WERE GOOD TO US -- HELPED MY DAD IN HIS CAREER...

... BUT, OF COURSE, THAT WAS ALL BEFORE I KNEW WHAT YOU REALLY ARE... A VAMPIRE KING!



NOW, NOW, LAD, LET'S NOT BE SO DRAMATIC. YOU AND I ARE THE SAME. WE COULD BE GREAT ALLIES.

I KEEP SAVING YOUR LIFE, DON'T I?



WHY IS THAT, BY THE WAY?

I HAVE MY REASONS.



REASONS I'LL GLADLY SHARE IF YOU'D JUST RELAX A BIT...

YOU'D LIKE THAT, WOULDN'T YOU? I DROP MY GUARD AND YOU CAN GRAB A PIECE OF ME... JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE!

HAVEN'T YOU FIGURED OUT ANY OF THIS YET, ALEX -- ARE YOU THAT STUPID? YOU'RE THE CHOSEN ONE, FOR GOD'S SAKE!



RIGHT -- CHOSEN TO WIPE THINGS LIKE YOU AND YOUR QUEEN LISSETH OFF THE EARTH -- AND I WILL!



GOOD FOR YOU, ALEX. WELL, I'VE GOT TO GET GOING...



WAIT. IS IT TRUE THAT YOU WERE A CHOSEN ONE TOO?





...
YES,
ALEX... I
WAS.

BUT I
FOUND THAT
EKIMUS AND I
HAD VASTLY
DIFFERENT IDEAS
ABOUT WHAT
THAT MEANT.

YOU WILL,
TOO -- IF
YOU HAVEN'T
ALREADY.



WAIT A MINUTE... IT'S STARTING
TO MAKE SENSE. YOU'VE SAVED
ME, STOOD UP FOR ME... MAYBE
YOU'RE NOT AS BAD AS YOU
WANT EVERYONE TO
THINK.

MAYBE
THERE'S STILL
SOME OF THAT
CHOSEN ONE
INSI --

DO NOT
GO THERE,
BOY...

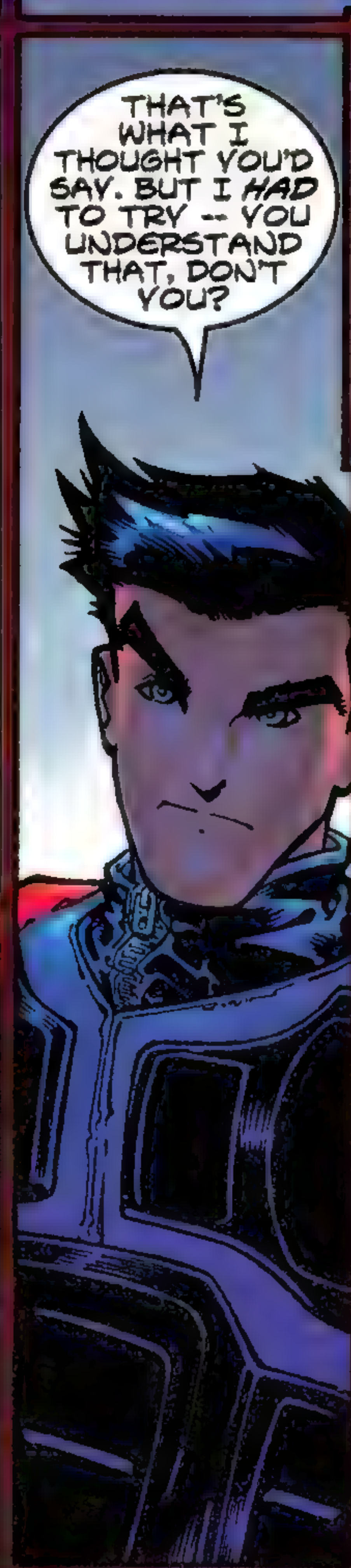


... I'VE SAVED
YOU BECAUSE I
KNOW WHAT YOU'RE
GOING THROUGH --
AND BECAUSE I
KNOW YOU'LL
OUTGROW THIS
IDiotic, PIOUS
CRAP!

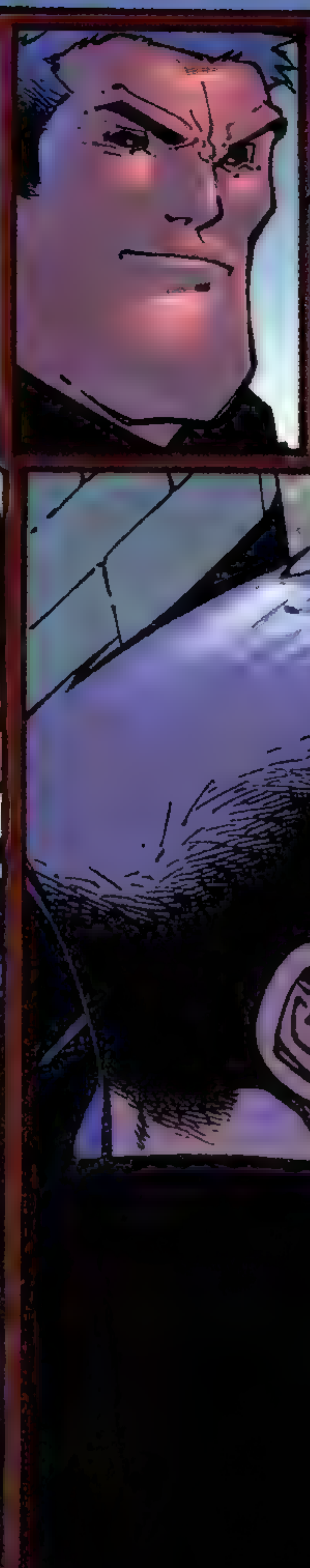


WE VAMPIRES DON'T
DO GOOD, YOU LITTLE
FOOL -- WE'RE
EVIL!

THE SOONER
YOU REALIZE
THAT AND JOIN
YOUR POWER TO
MINE, THE
BETTER YOU'LL
BE!



THAT'S
WHAT I
THOUGHT YOU'D
SAY. BUT I HAD
TO TRY -- YOU
UNDERSTAND
THAT, DON'T
YOU?

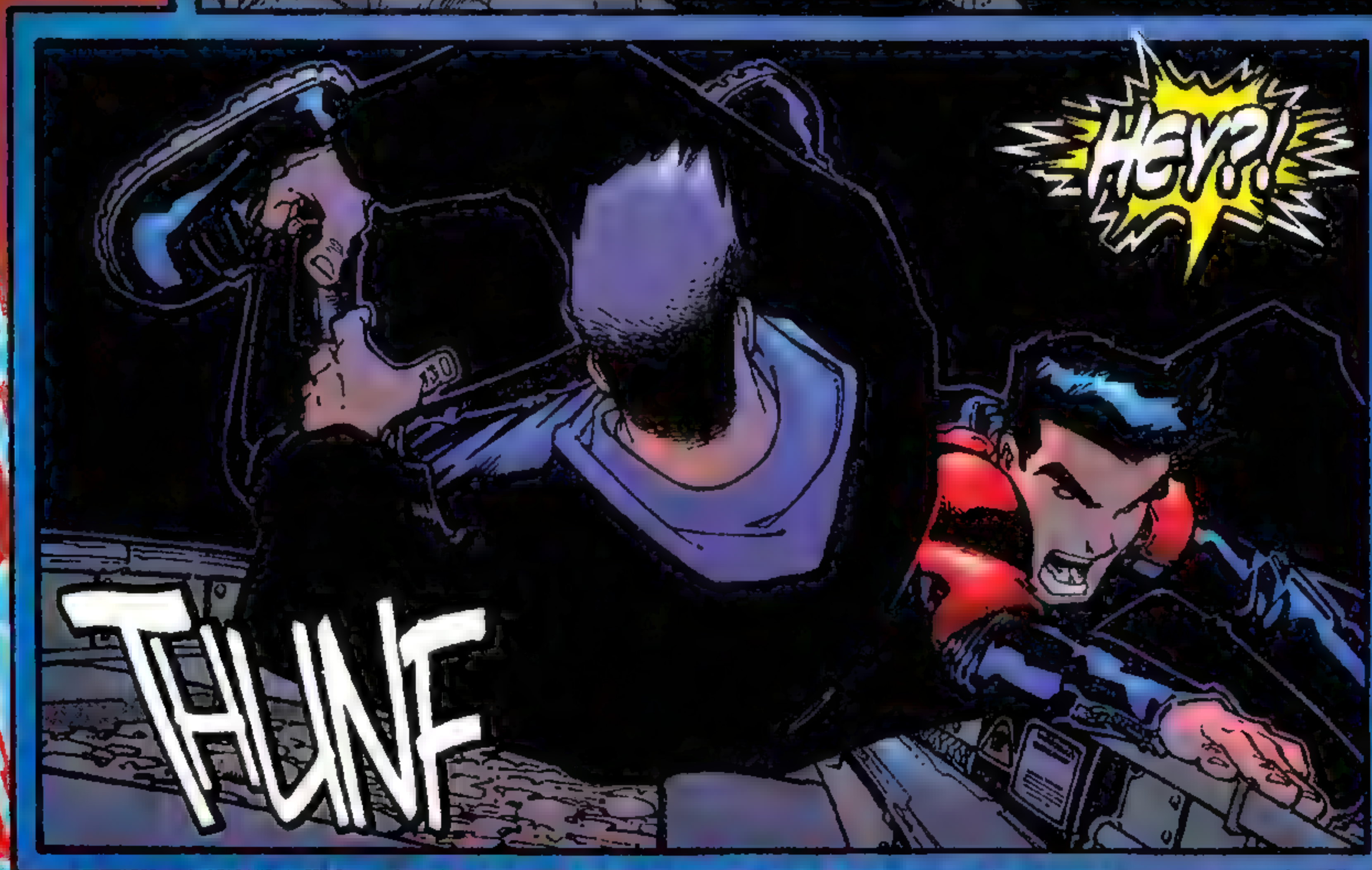


WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT...?

I'M SAYING
THE **GLOVES**
ARE OFF...



... AND
YOU'RE
GOING
DOWN!

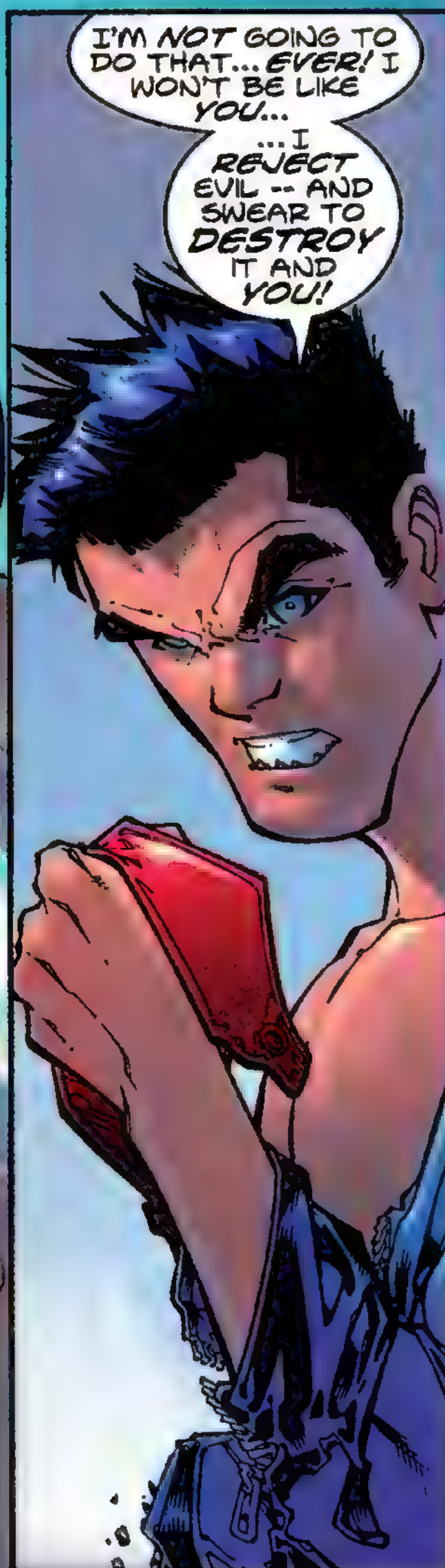




IT TICKLES...

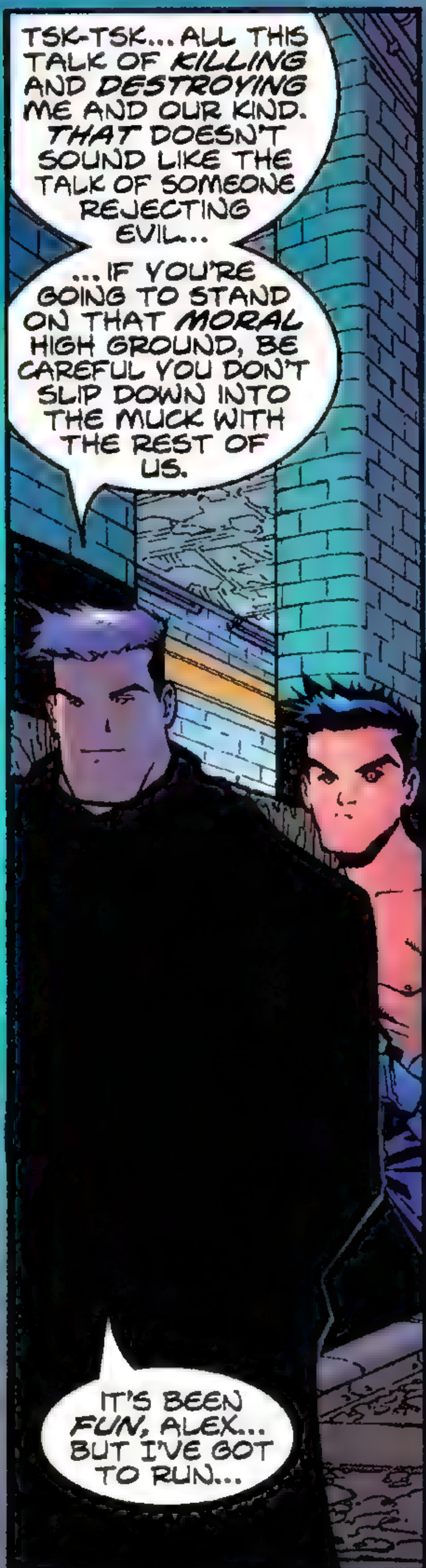


ALEX,
ALEX,
ALEX.
HOW CAN YOU
TASTE THE NEAR
LIMITLESS POWER
OF OUR KIND AND
NOT SURRENDER
TO ITS SWEET
CORRUPTION?



I'M NOT GOING TO
DO THAT... EVER! I
WON'T BE LIKE
YOU...

...I
REJECT
EVIL -- AND
SWEAR TO
DESTROY
IT AND
YOU!



TSK-TSK... ALL THIS
TALK OF KILLING
AND DESTROYING
ME AND OUR KIND.
THAT DOESN'T
SOUND LIKE THE
TALK OF SOMEONE
REJECTING
EVIL...

...IF YOU'RE
GOING TO STAND
ON THAT MORAL
HIGH GROUND, BE
CAREFUL YOU DON'T
SLIP DOWN INTO
THE MUCK WITH
THE REST OF
US.

IT'S BEEN
FUN, ALEX...
BUT I'VE GOT
TO RUN...

OOH,
LOOK WHAT
YOU DID...

...FIRECASTING
IS A PRETTY TRICK,
BUT IT WON'T STOP
ME AS IT DID AZZO --
HE WAS ALREADY TOO
HOT UNDER THE
COLLAR...*

*COUNT AZZO WAS A LIEUTENANT OF
LISSETH WHO WAS IMMOBILIZED BY
ALEX'S POWER IN ISSUE #12 - Scott

IF I TURN IT UP EVEN YOU
WOULD COOK -- DON'T
EVER UNDERESTIMATE
ME, SENATOR.

I DON'T, ALEX... I FULLY
REALIZE YOUR POWER...
AND YOUR *POTENTIAL*.
THAT'S WHY I'D RATHER
HAVE YOU ON OUR
SIDE!

MAYBE
I'D RATHER
TAKE YOU
APART *PIECE*
BY *PIECE*!

IF YOU CAN'T RESPECT THE
MAN, ALEX, YOU MIGHT AT
LEAST GO EASY ON THE
WARDROBE -- THIS
DESIGNER STUFF IS
EXPENSIVE!

DON'T
LAUGH AT ME,
YOU JACKAL --
I WILL KILL
YOU AND
LISSETH --!

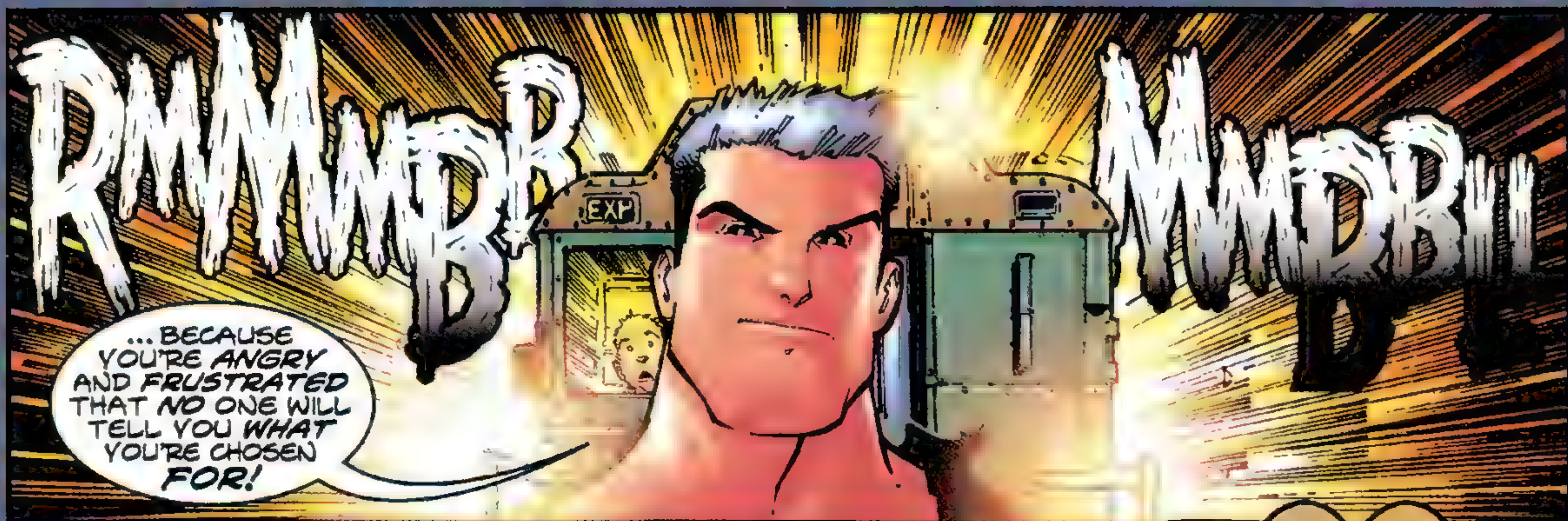
SHRIIP

THIS
ISN'T
ABOUT ME
AT ALL,
IS IT?

YOU *HATE* WHAT YOU
ARE AND WHAT YOU
WILL BECOME -- AND
YOU'RE *SICKENED* TO
YOUR DARKENING
SOUL, AREN'T
YOU?

YOU
JUST WANT
SOMETHING
TO HIT...

RMMMBBIL





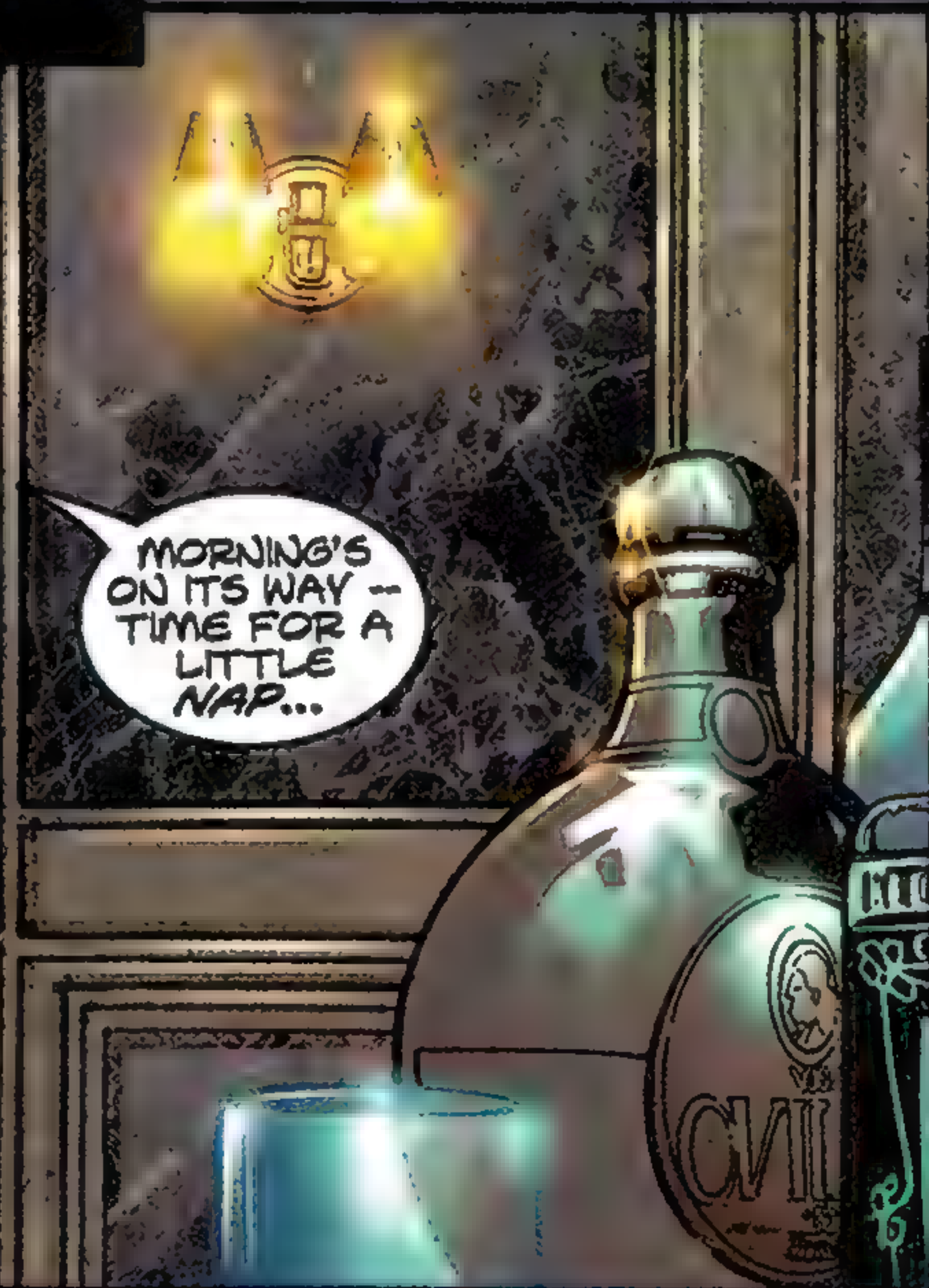
HELL.



LATER...

AHHH...

...NOTHING LIKE A GOOD SCALDING SHOWER TO WASH AWAY THE GRIME OF THE SUBWAY EXPERIENCE.



MORNING'S ON ITS WAY -- TIME FOR A LITTLE NAP...



...BUT FIRST MY PRAYERS.

...CONTINUE YOUR BOUNTIFUL BENEFICENCE ON THIS YOUR HUMBLE SERVANT.
THROUGH THE BLOOD OF THE HELPLESS SHEEP YOU SEND US...
SELAH.



DARK LORDS OF THE PIT HEAR ME... AND GRANT MY HEART'S BLACK DESIRES...

...GREAT BE YOUR MYRIAD NAMES, AND INFINITE YOUR DOMAIN...





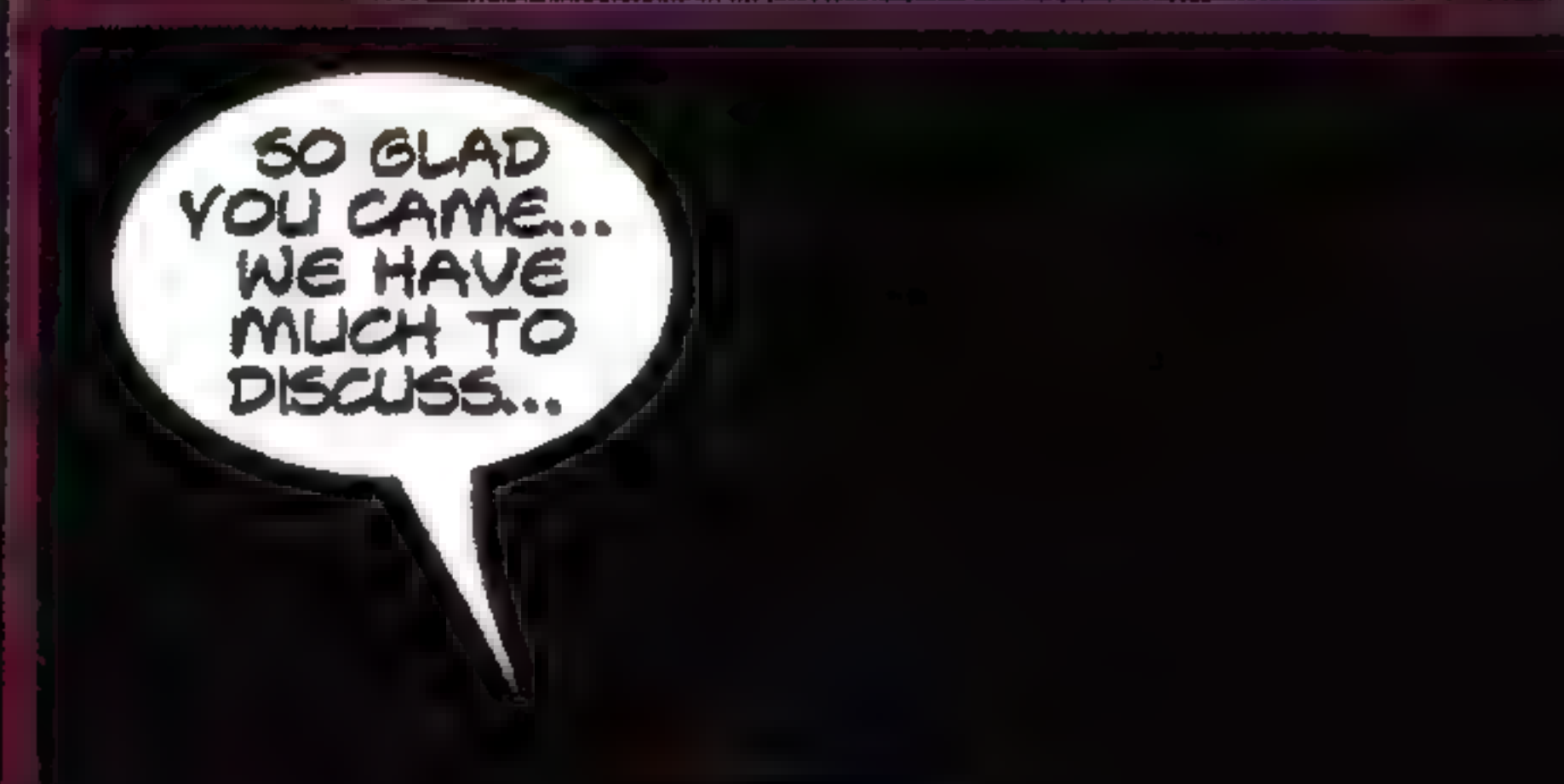
EXCELLENT...
YOU LET
YOURSELF
IN.



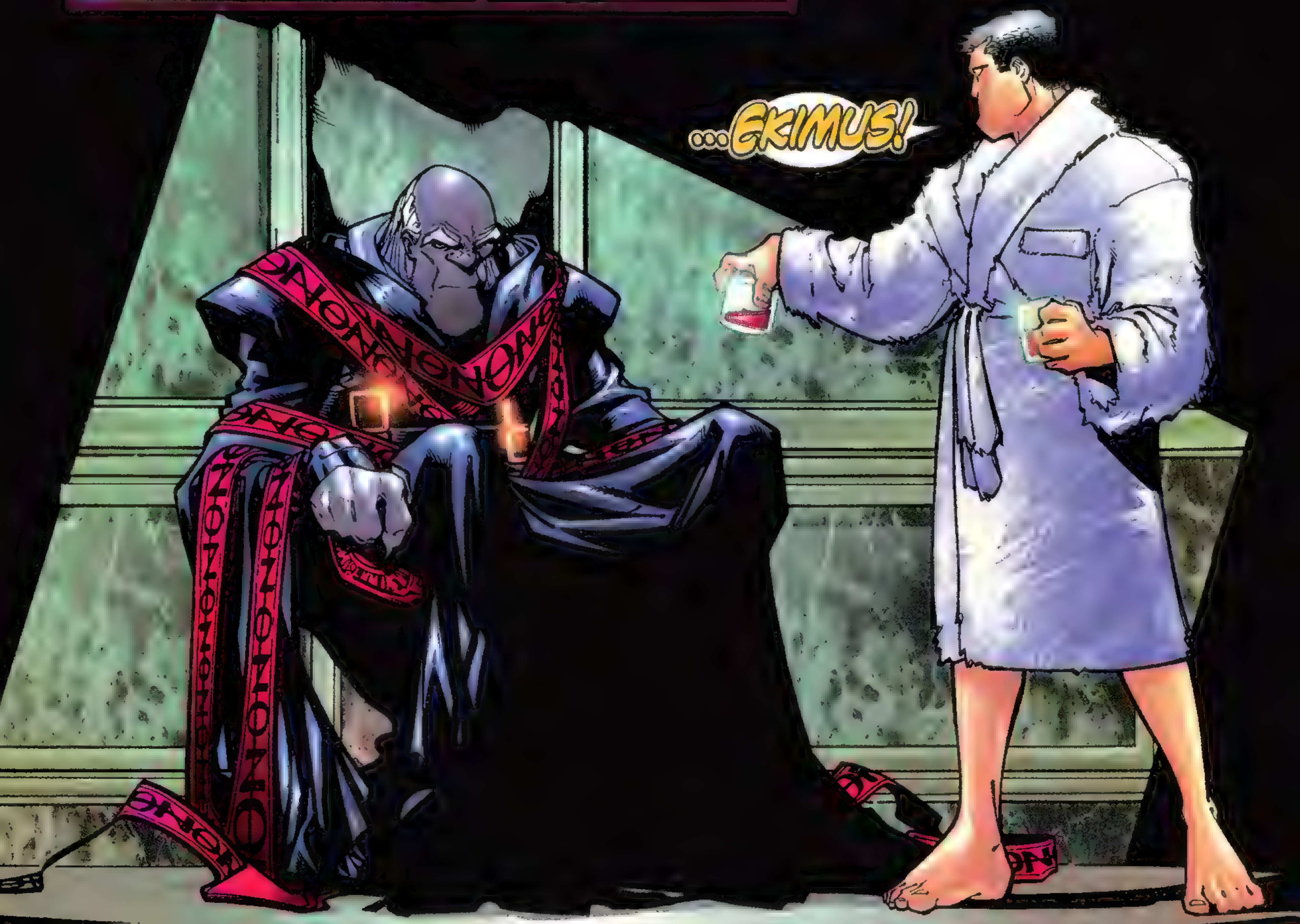
GLUG
GLUG
GLUG



I THINK YOU'LL
LIKE THIS.
12 YEARS
OLD. SINGLE
MALT.
SMOOTHER
THAN A
VIRGIN'S
THROAT.



SO GLAD
YOU CAME...
WE HAVE
MUCH TO
DISCUSS...



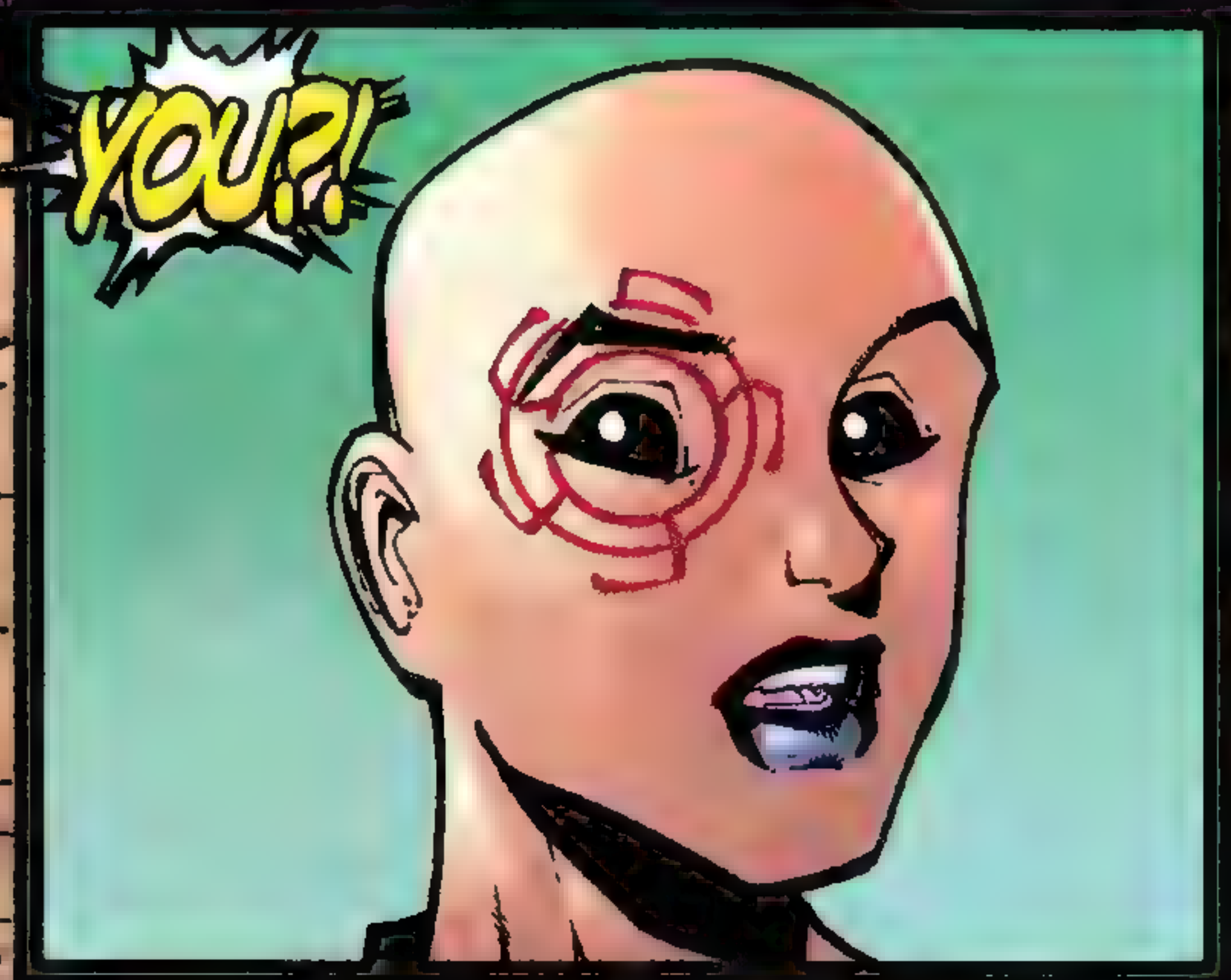
...EKIMUS!



THE ROOM SMELLS OF ROSES...
IT IS THE PERFECT PLACE TO FIND
AN ANGEL. AND I KNOW SHE WILL
BE THERE...

"NOW THAT
WE HAVE SEEN
EACH OTHER AGAIN,"
SAID THE UNICORN,
"IF YOU'LL BELIEVE IN
ME, I'LL BELIEVE IN
YOU. IS THAT A
BARGAIN?"

LEWIS
CARROLL,
"THROUGH
THE LOOKING
GLASS."







CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

TWISTED PATHS

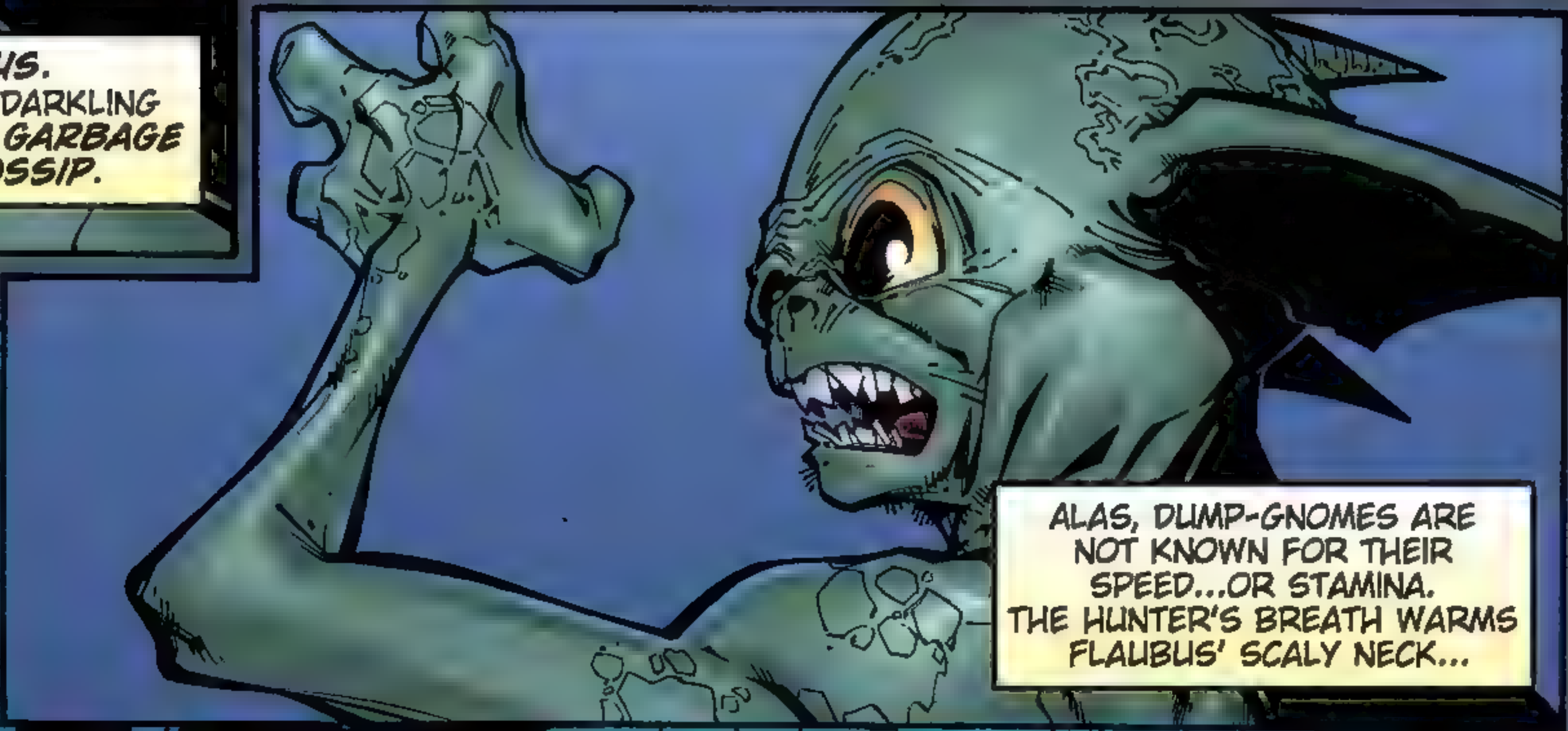


ITS NAME IS FLAUBUS.
AN EXTREMELY MINOR DARKLING
WITH AN AFFINITY FOR GARBAGE
AND A TALENT FOR GOSSIP.



IT IS THIS LATTER TRAIT THAT
HAS THE POOR DEMON ON THE
RUN THROUGH NEW YORK'S
LINCOLN TUNNEL AT THREE A.M.

A-HOOO
-HOOO
-HOOO



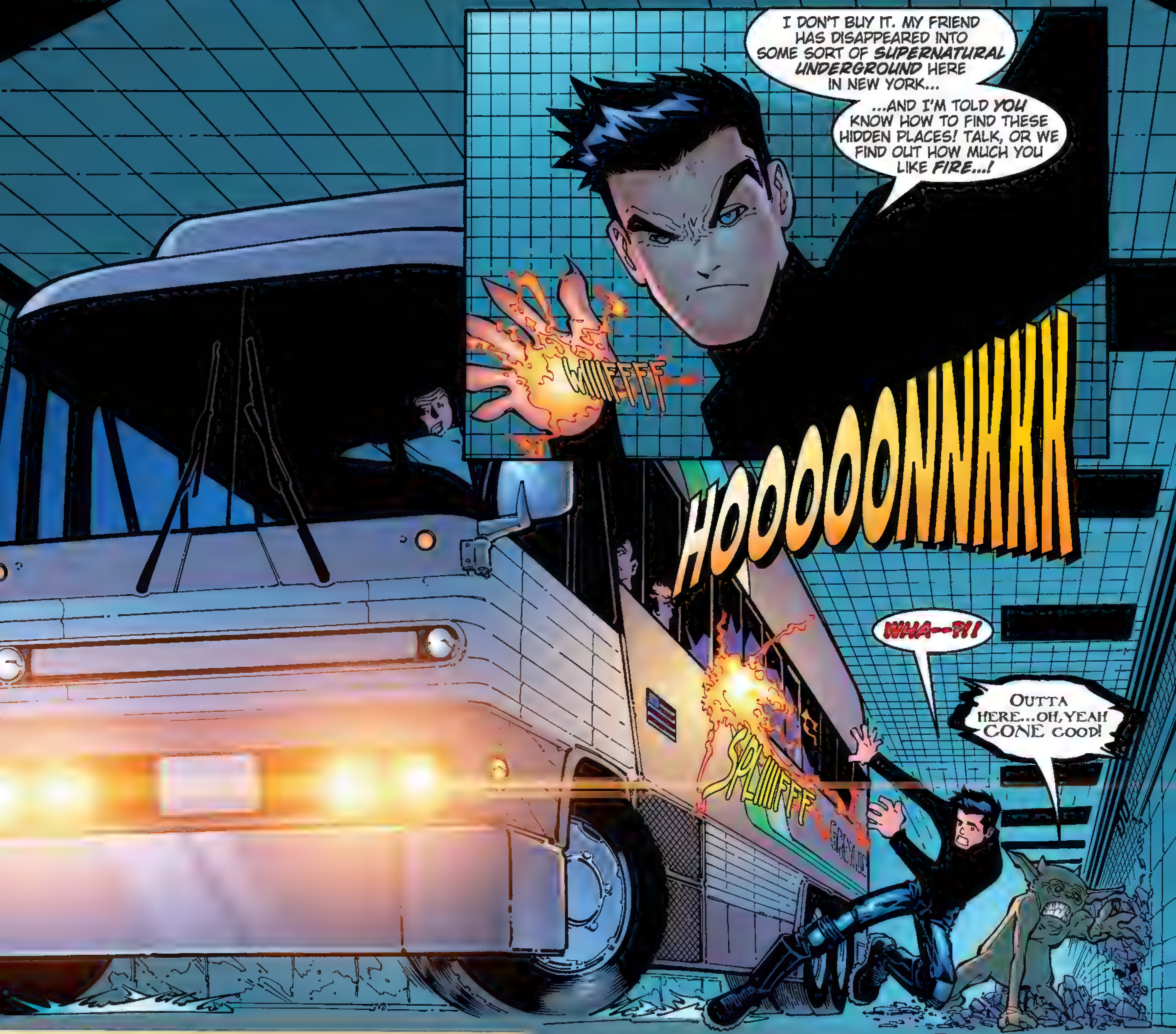
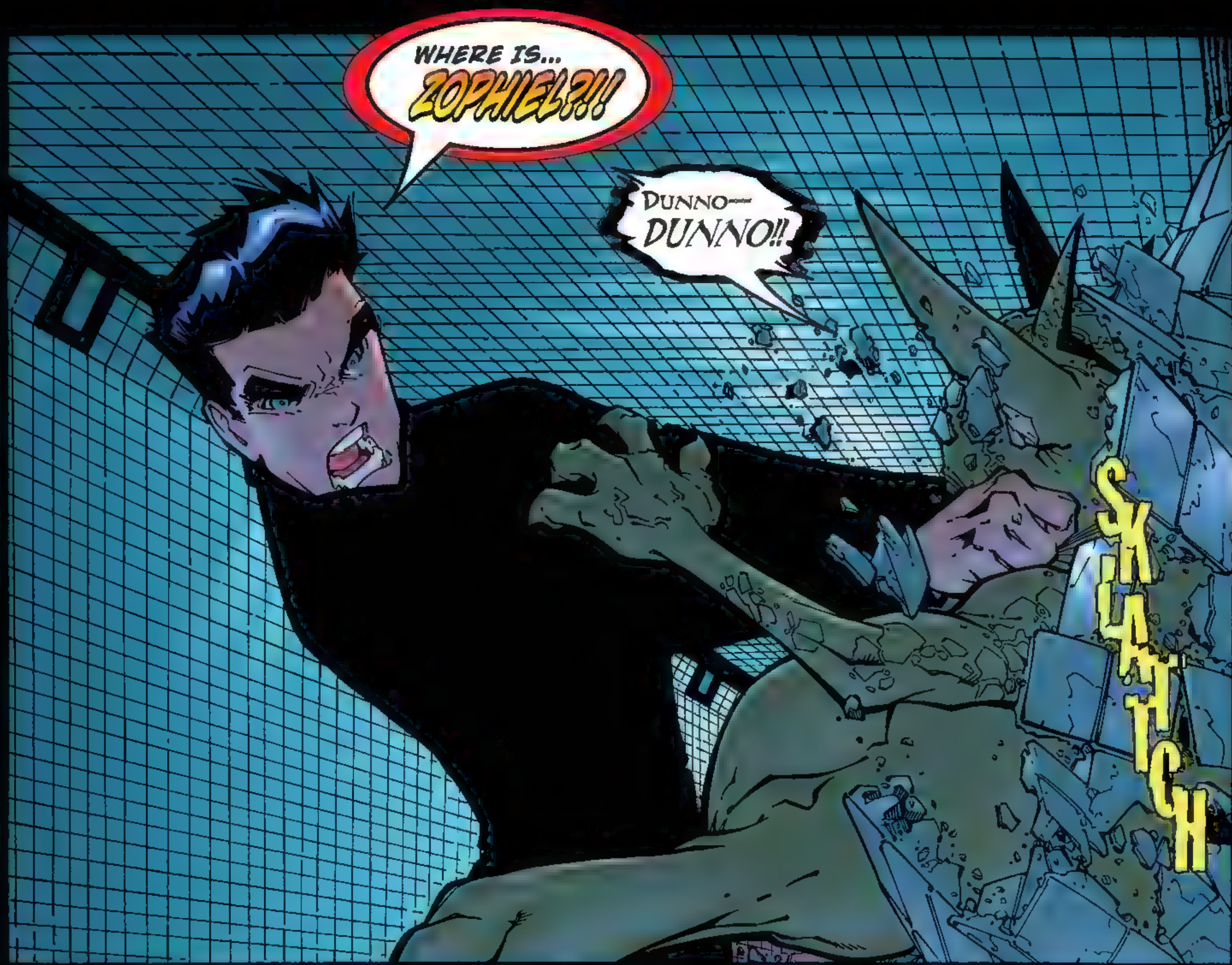
ALAS, DUMP-GNOMES ARE
NOT KNOWN FOR THEIR
SPEED...OR STAMINA.
THE HUNTER'S BREATH WARMS
FLAUBUS' SCALY NECK...

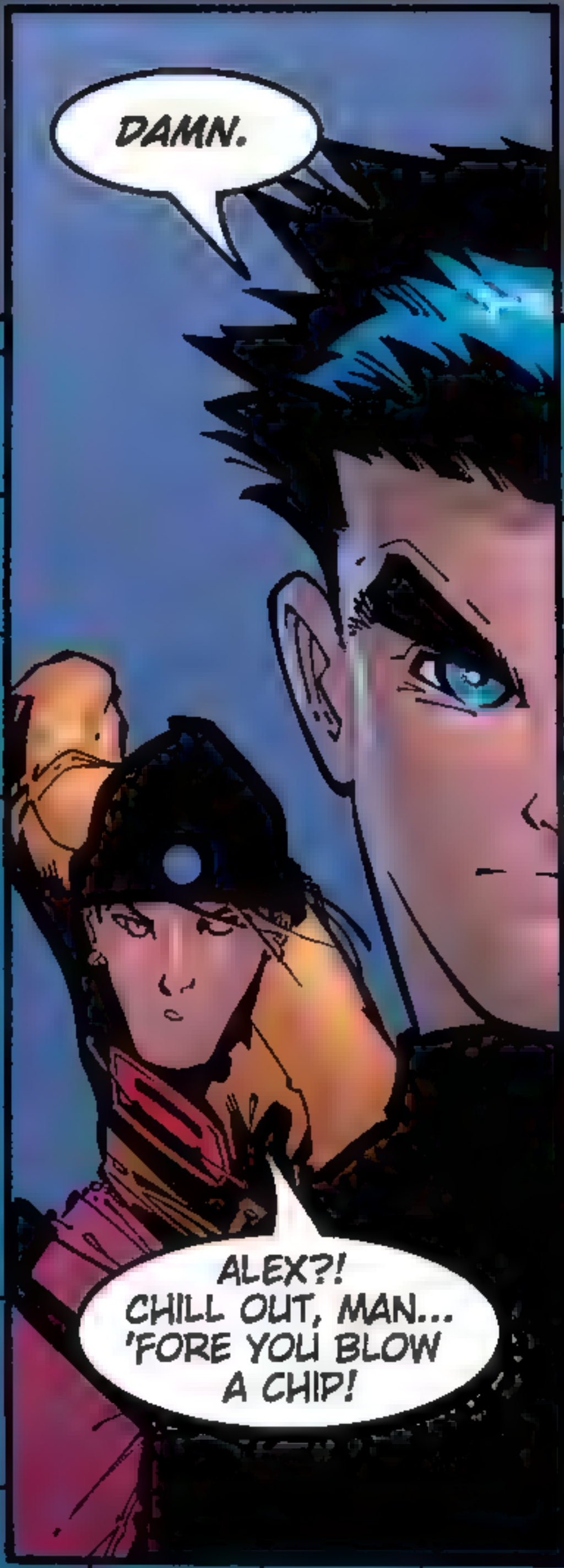
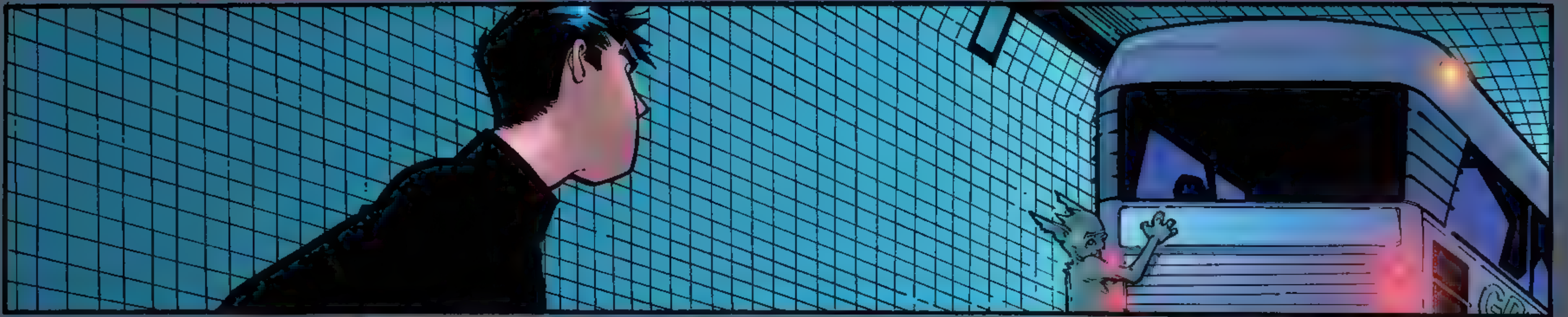


GOT YOU!!

NOOOO!

TELL ME WHERE
SHE IS!!





DAMN.

ALEX?!
CHILL OUT, MAN...
'FORE YOU BLOW
A CHIP!



YOU GOTTA *REST*, M'MAN--
SINCE ZOPHIEL GOT GRABBED
YOU BEEN PUSHIN' YOURSELF
WAY TOO HARD!

YOU LOSIN'
CONTROL LIKE A
ROOKIE...!



WHUUUP?!

GET THIS
STRAIGHT, JOE.
I'M IN PERFECT CONTROL,
BUT THIS IS *URGENT*.

SOMEONE TOOK
ZOPHIEL... AND FROM
THE MESSAGE AT HER PLACE,
THAT SOMEONE APPARENTLY
KNOWS SHE'S A
FALLEN ANGEL...



...AND KNOWS THAT
I'M THE SO-CALLED
CHOSEN ONE!

THIS HAS GOT TO
BE SOMETHING VAN FLEET
AND LISSETH HAVE COOKED
UP TO GET AT ME!



MA-A-A-AN,
GET OVER YOURSELF,
BOBO!
NOT EVERYTHING
IS ABOUT YOU!

AN' TRUST
ME, YOU ARE NO
WHERE NEAR IN
CONTROL!



WHAT YOU
HAVE BEEN IS A
FULL-TIME PAIN
IN THE--

I-I...JOE,
I'M REALLY...



...SORRY.
I MAY BE A VAMPIRE AND
THE CHOSEN--BUT I'M STILL ONLY
SIXTEEN! ALL I WANT TO DO
IS TAKE CARE OF THE ONES
I LOVE...AND I DON'T
KNOW HOW!

I CAN'T
PROTECT MY FAMILY,
'CAUSE THEY DON'T EVEN
KNOW I'M ALIVE...

...AND NOW
I CAN'T HELP
ZOPHIEL...

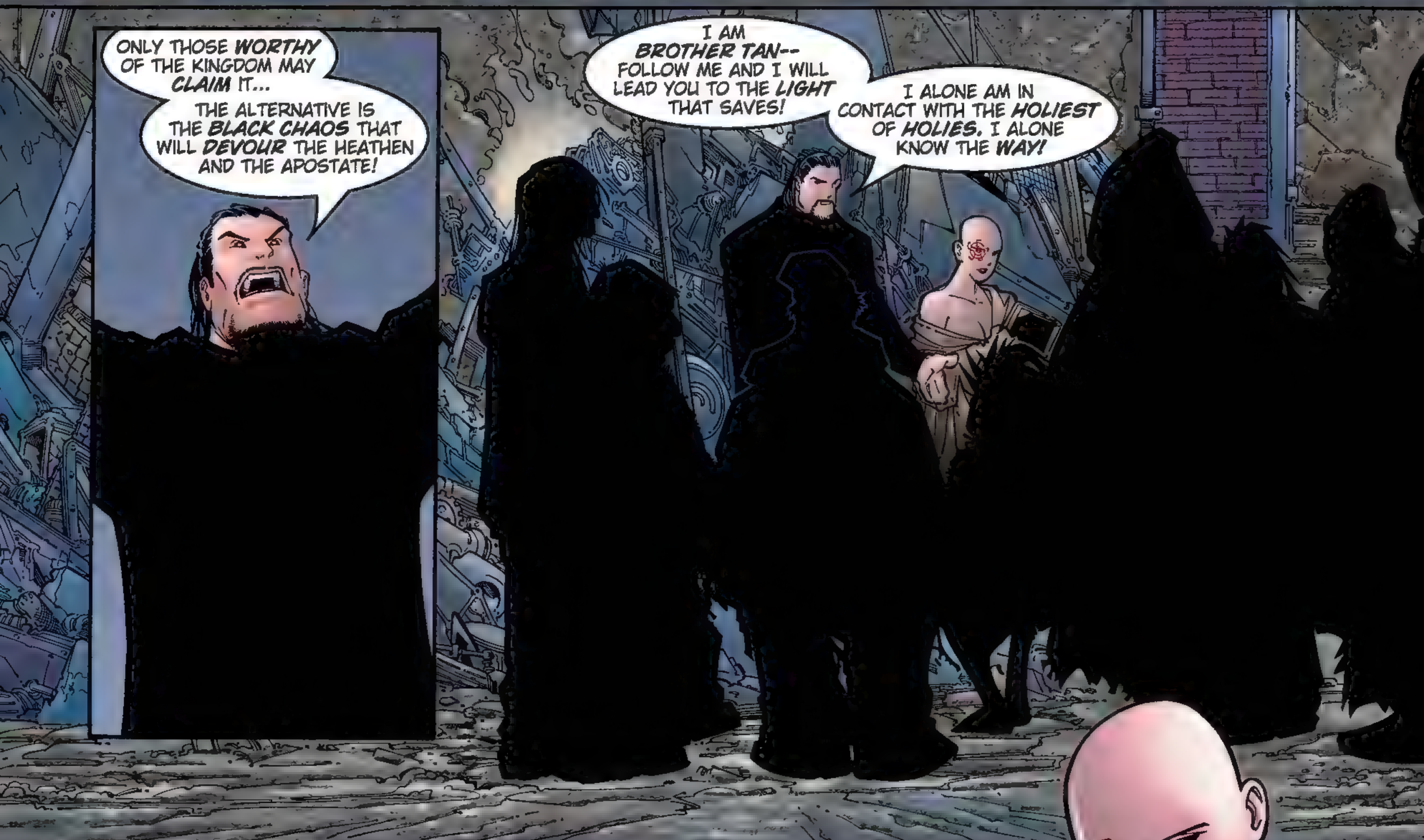




OKAY, THEN...WE
BETTER GET *BUSY* FINDIN' HER,
EH? C'MON, I KNOW PEOPLE
WHO KNOW THINGS...

BELOVED,
HEAR ME! THE NEW
MILLENNIUM HAS DAWNED, AND
WITH IT THE *KINGDOM* HAS
FINALLY COME!

JUDGMENT
IS UPON US.
REPENT...AND
BELIEVE!



ONLY THOSE *WORTHY*
OF THE KINGDOM MAY
CLAIM IT...

THE ALTERNATIVE IS
THE *BLACK CHAOS* THAT
WILL *DEVOUR* THE HEATHEN
AND THE APOSTATE!

I AM
BROTHER TAN--
FOLLOW ME AND I WILL
LEAD YOU TO THE *LIGHT*
THAT SAVES!

I ALONE AM IN
CONTACT WITH THE *HOLDEST*
OF *HOLIES*. I ALONE
KNOW THE *WAY!*

I HAVE BEEN GIVEN
PROPHESIES TO SHARE...
SISTER *ZOPHIEL* WAS ONCE
OF THE *HOST*, SHE KNOWS
THE *TRUTH!*

READ FROM
THE BOOK, SISTER.

YES...
BROTHER...





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ᄒᄒᄒ

THE FALLEN ANGEL
SPEAKS A LANGUAGE
HUMAN EARS HAVE NEVER
HEARD. IT IS THE ORIGINAL
LANGUAGE OF EDEN...



...AND THOUGH HER ACCENT IS OBSCURE,
THE LANGUAGE LIVES ON IN SUCH AS
THESE. MOST OF THESE NIGHT-BEINGS
GRASP THE ESSENCE OF THE PROPHECY...



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...THEY HEAR WORDS OF
THE CREATOR'S LOVE...
OF THE NEED FOR FAITH
AND SOLIDARITY UNDER
HEAVENLY RULE.



ALL FAMILIAR IDEAS, DELIVERED
UNDER THE PRESUMED AUTHORITY
OF THIS MAN CALLED TAN...

...WHICH SOURS THE LOFTY
SENTIMENTS SOMEHOW,
BUT THESE CREATURES ARE
HUNGRY FOR THE MESSAGE...



...FOR THEY'VE BEEN
SO LONG APART FROM
CREATION, AND COMPLETELY
DEVOID OF ACCEPTANCE.
THEY LISTEN GLADLY.

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ᄒᄒᄒ ᄒᄒᄒ



HIS NAME IS *EKIMUS*, AN IMMORTAL BEING BORN BEFORE THE DAWN OF HUMAN-KIND. FOR HIS MANY SINS, HE SEEKS REDEMPTION AND REST...

...HIS QUEST HAS LED HIM TO THE STYGIAN DARKNESS OF THIS STRANGE UNDERGROUND PASSAGE...

..A PASSAGE TO THE DEPTHS OF THE SUPERNATURAL NETHERWORLD ITSELF.

EKIMUS REMEMBERS WHAT HE WAS TOLD BY VICTOR VAN FLEET, THE VAMPIRE LORD WHO RULES AT LISSETH'S SIDE...

SHE IS *DARKNESS* ITSELF-- NOTHING ON *EARTH* CAN STAND AGAINST HER. SHE HAS NO *SOUL*, YOU KNOW THIS--

IT IS, LITERALLY, A CHANNEL TO *HELL*.

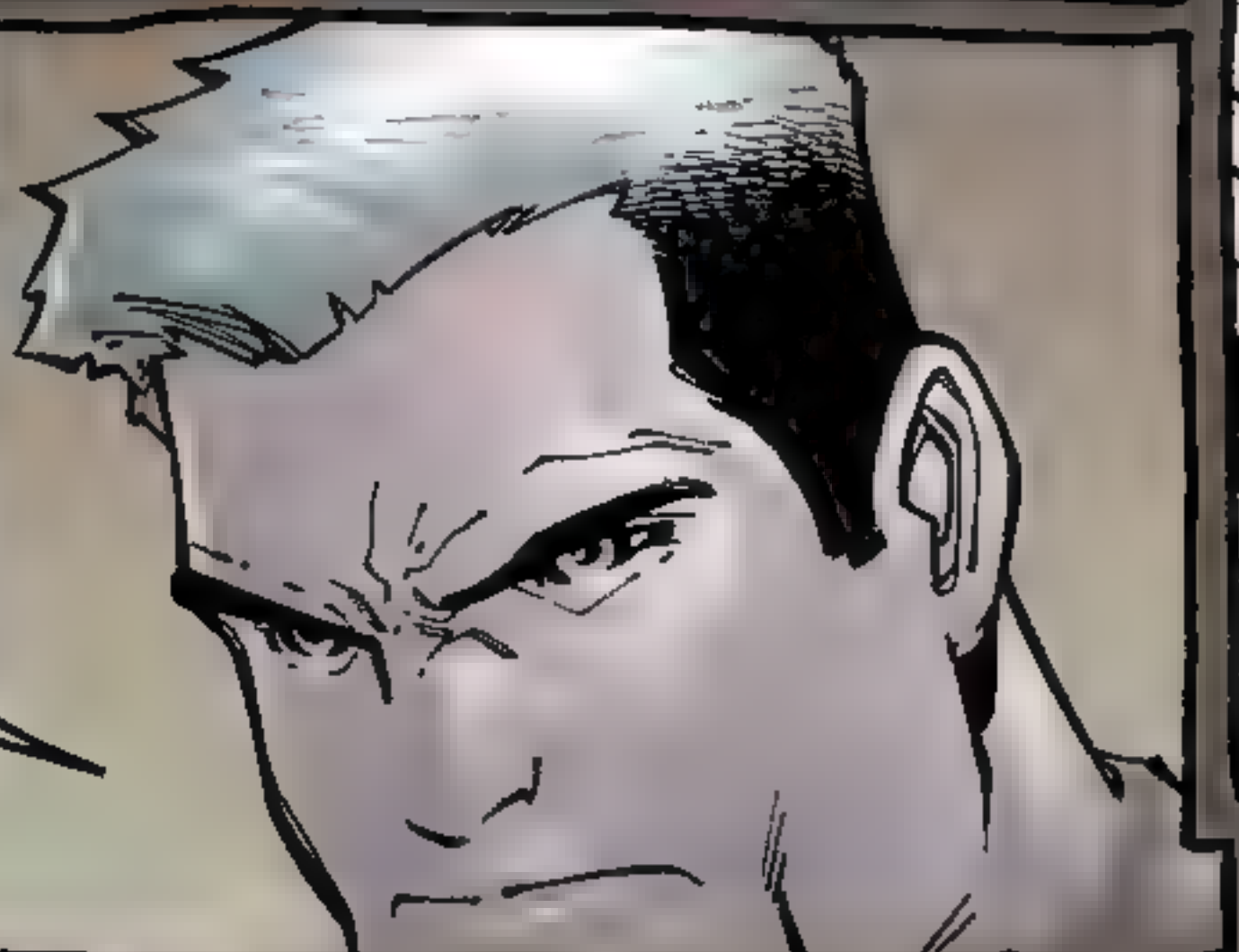
EKIMUS KNOWS THAT ONLY THERE CAN HE FIND A WAY TO *END* LISSETH'S IMMORTAL EVIL.

--AND THAT MISSING SPACE HAS BEEN FILLED WITH BITTERNESS AND DARK, TERRIBLE POWER! SHE LIVES ONLY TO CORRUPT AND SPOIL CREATION.

EVEN IN THE BEGINNING HER FURY WAS OVERWHELMING. IT TOOK TWO POWERFUL *DRAGONS* TO BANISH HER FROM EDEN.

SHE CARRIED WITH HER AN ETERNAL SECRET GIVEN HER BY THE *HIDDEN ONE*--

--A SECRET THAT SERVES HER POWER TO THIS DAY!



"SEEK OUT THE DRAGON IN TARTARUS--HE KNOWS HER SECRET TOO..."

"...HE WHO LEARNS IT, WILL HAVE THE POWER TO DESTROY LISSETH."

EKIMUR KNOWS THAT A VAIN, SELF-SERVING POLITICIAN LIKE VAN FLEET WOULD NEVER HELP HIM WITHOUT SOME PERSONAL GAIN IN MIND...

...BUT THAT ISN'T A CONCERN -- VAN FLEET IS NO THREAT **EXACTLY** BECAUSE HE IS SO PREDICTABLY AMBITIOUS.

BESIDES, WHEN LISSETH DIES, VAN FLEET WILL BE A HARMLESS ORPHAN...

EKIMUR DOESN'T CARE ANYWAY, FOR HE IS CERTAIN THAT THIS PATH IS THE LAST ONE HE WILL WALK.

IT IS HIS HOPE THAT HIS JOURNEY WILL FINALLY END IN SWEET OBLIVION...

...ALONGSIDE LISSETH, HIS ENEMY AND FORMER LOVER. **THEY** DESERVE TO DIE **TOGETHER!**

THE STENCH AND ICY CHILL TELL HIM THAT HE IS **CLOSE**. A SMALL SOUND **WARNS** HIM THAT **SOMETHING** HAS NOTICED HIS PASSAGE...

WUWUWU--!

WUWUWU

The comic book page depicts a dramatic moment where Ekimius, a powerful dragon-like being, confronts his former lover Lisseth. Ekimius, shown in a close-up at the top right, has a stern expression and wears a crown. He holds a wooden staff. Below him, a smaller panel shows Lisseth running through a rocky, desolate landscape towards a bright light. The background features a large, glowing sun or moon. The page is filled with dialogue boxes explaining Ekimius's motivations and the emotional weight of the encounter. Sound effects like "WUWH--!" and "KUHUUUU" are used to convey action and intensity.

"SEEK OUT THE DRAGON IN
TARTARUS--HE KNOWS
HER SECRET TOO..."

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WILL HAVE THE POWER TO
DESTROY LISSETH."

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LOVER. THEY DESERVE
TO DIE **TOGETHER!**

THE STENCH AND ICY CHILL
TELL HIM THAT HE IS **CLOSE**.
A SMALL SOUND **WARNS** HIM
THAT **SOMETHING** HAS
NOTICED HIS PASSAGE...

WUWH--!

KUHUUUU

This is a full-page comic panel from Dragon Ball Super. The scene is set in a dark, rocky cavern with a bright light source in the upper center. In the top right, a large, close-up portrait of Ekimius, a man with grey skin, red eyes, and a blue hooded cloak, looks down with a stern expression. Below him, a smaller panel shows a bright orange energy blast hitting a rocky surface. To the left, a hand in a blue-gloved gauntlet holds a wooden staff. Further down, another panel shows a character in a red and black outfit running through a cave. At the bottom, a large, detailed illustration shows Ekimius lunging forward with great speed, his body blurred by motion lines. A speech bubble next to him contains the sound effect "WUHHH!!". On the far right, large, stylized red letters spell out "WHOOO". Several text boxes are scattered throughout the page, providing narrative context about Ekimius's motives and the presence of other characters like Lisseth and Van Fleet.

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THAT **SOMETHING** HAS
NOTICED HIS PASSAGE...

WUHHH!!

WHOOO

The comic book page depicts a scene with a dragon-like character named Ekimus. In the upper right, Ekimus is shown from the chest up, wearing a blue hooded cloak with red trim and having red eyes. He holds a thick wooden staff. A large speech bubble above him contains two lines of text. Below this, a smaller panel shows Ekimus's hand gripping the staff. To the right, another panel shows a close-up of Ekimus's face as he looks down. Further down, a panel shows Ekimus's mouth open as if speaking, with sound effects written below it. The background consists of dark, jagged rock formations against a bright, hazy sky. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, greys, and a warm orange glow from the light source.

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TELL HIM THAT HE IS **CLOSE**.
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NOTICED HIS PASSAGE...

UWWWWW--!

KUHUUDD

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THE STENCH AND ICY CHILL TELL HIM THAT HE IS *CLOSE*. A SMALL SOUND *WARNS* HIM THAT *SOMETHING* HAS NOTICED HIS PASSAGE...

WUWUWU--!

WUWUWU

The comic book page depicts a scene in a dark, rocky cavern. At the top right, a close-up panel shows Ekimus, a dragon-like creature with grey scales, red eyes, and a blue hooded cloak. He holds a wooden staff across his chest. A large, bright light source, possibly a fire or lava flow, illuminates the background. Below this, a larger panel shows Ekimus from the waist up, looking down at a small figure in the distance. The figure is surrounded by a bright orange glow. To the left, a smaller panel shows a hand gripping the wooden staff. The bottom section features two more panels: one showing Ekimus's face in profile as he looks towards the right, and another showing him from the side, looking down at the ground. The overall color palette is dominated by reds, oranges, and greys, creating a dramatic and intense atmosphere.

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LOVER. THEY DESERVE
TO DIE TOGETHER!

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TELL HIM THAT HE IS CLOSE.
A SMALL SOUND WARNS HIM
THAT SOMETHING HAS
NOTICED HIS PASSAGE...

UWWWWW--!

KUHUUDD

The comic book page depicts a scene set in a dark, cavernous environment. At the top right, a large panel shows a close-up of Ekimus, a dragon-like creature with grey scales, red eyes, and a blue hooded cloak. He holds a wooden staff across his chest. Below this, two smaller panels show his hand gripping the staff and a distant view of him standing in a rocky landscape under a bright, glowing light. Further down, another panel shows a close-up of his face as he looks forward. A final panel at the bottom shows his mouth open in a wide, toothy grin, with sound effects like "WUHHH!!!" and "KUHUUUU" written around it. The entire page is filled with dialogue boxes containing text about his motivations and actions.

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WUHHH!!

WHOOO

The comic book page depicts Ekimus, a dragon-like creature with grey scales and red eyes, wearing a blue hooded cloak and a red sash. He holds a thick wooden staff. The scene is set in a dark, cavernous or mountainous environment with jagged rock formations. A bright light source, possibly the sun, creates a strong lens flare at the top center. The page is divided into several panels by black borders. Speech bubbles contain dialogue about Tartarus, Lisseth, and Van Fleet. Sound effects like "WUHHH!!!" and "KUHUUDD" are integrated into the artwork.

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WUHHH!!!

KUHUUDD

The comic book page depicts a dramatic moment where Ekimius, a powerful dragon-like being, confronts his former lover Lisseth. Ekimius is shown in a close-up, looking down with a cold expression. He holds a wooden staff, which he uses to strike the ground, creating a massive explosion. In the background, Lisseth is seen running away through a desolate, rocky landscape under a bright, hazy sky. The page includes several panels with dialogue and sound effects.

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BESIDES, WHEN LISSETH DIES, VAN FLEET WILL BE A HARMLESS ORPHAN...

EKIMUR DOESN'T CARE ANYWAY, FOR HE IS CERTAIN THAT THIS PATH IS THE LAST ONE HE WILL WALK.

IT IS HIS HOPE THAT HIS JOURNEY WILL FINALLY END IN SWEET OBLIVION...

...ALONGSIDE LISSETH, HIS ENEMY AND FORMER LOVER. THEY DESERVE TO DIE TOGETHER!

THE STENCH AND ICY CHILL TELL HIM THAT HE IS *CLOSE*. A SMALL SOUND *WARNS* HIM THAT *SOMETHING* HAS NOTICED HIS PASSAGE...

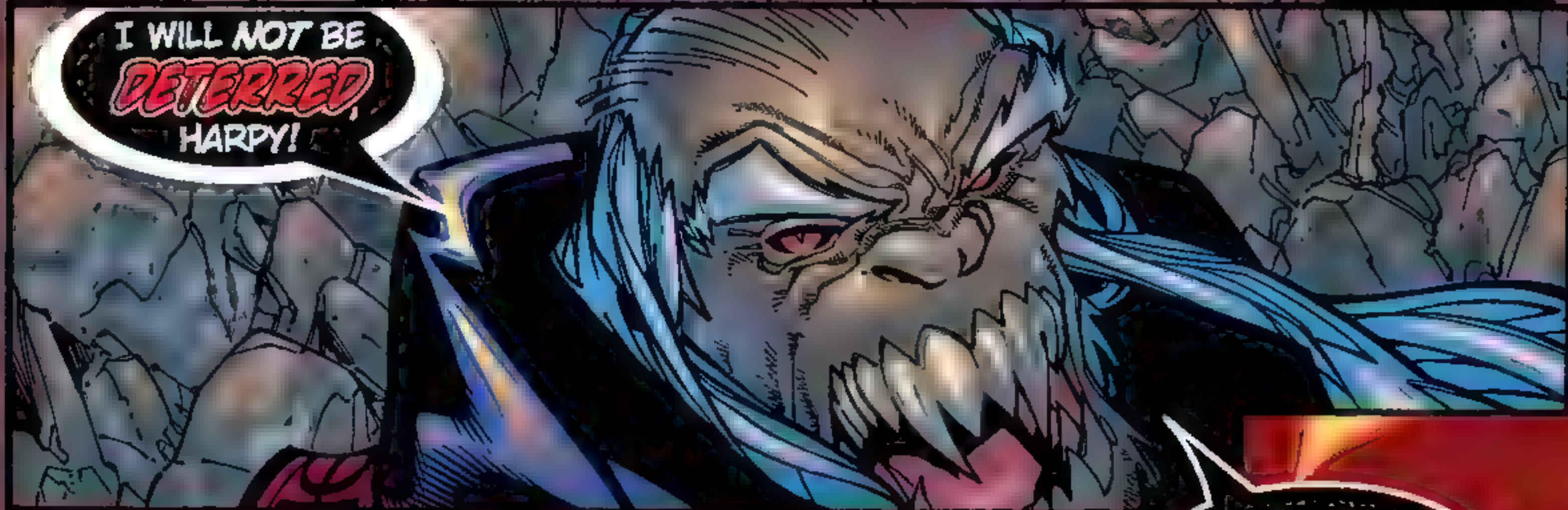
WUWUWU--!

WUWUWU--!



IT IS A GRIGORI, SISTERS-- WE HAVE NOT SEEN ONE OF THESE SINCE THE FALL OF EDEN!

YOU ARE UNWELCOME HERE, GARGOYLE!



I WILL NOT BE **PETERRED** HARPY!

FIRE IS YOUR ENEMY...
...BUT IT SERVES ME!



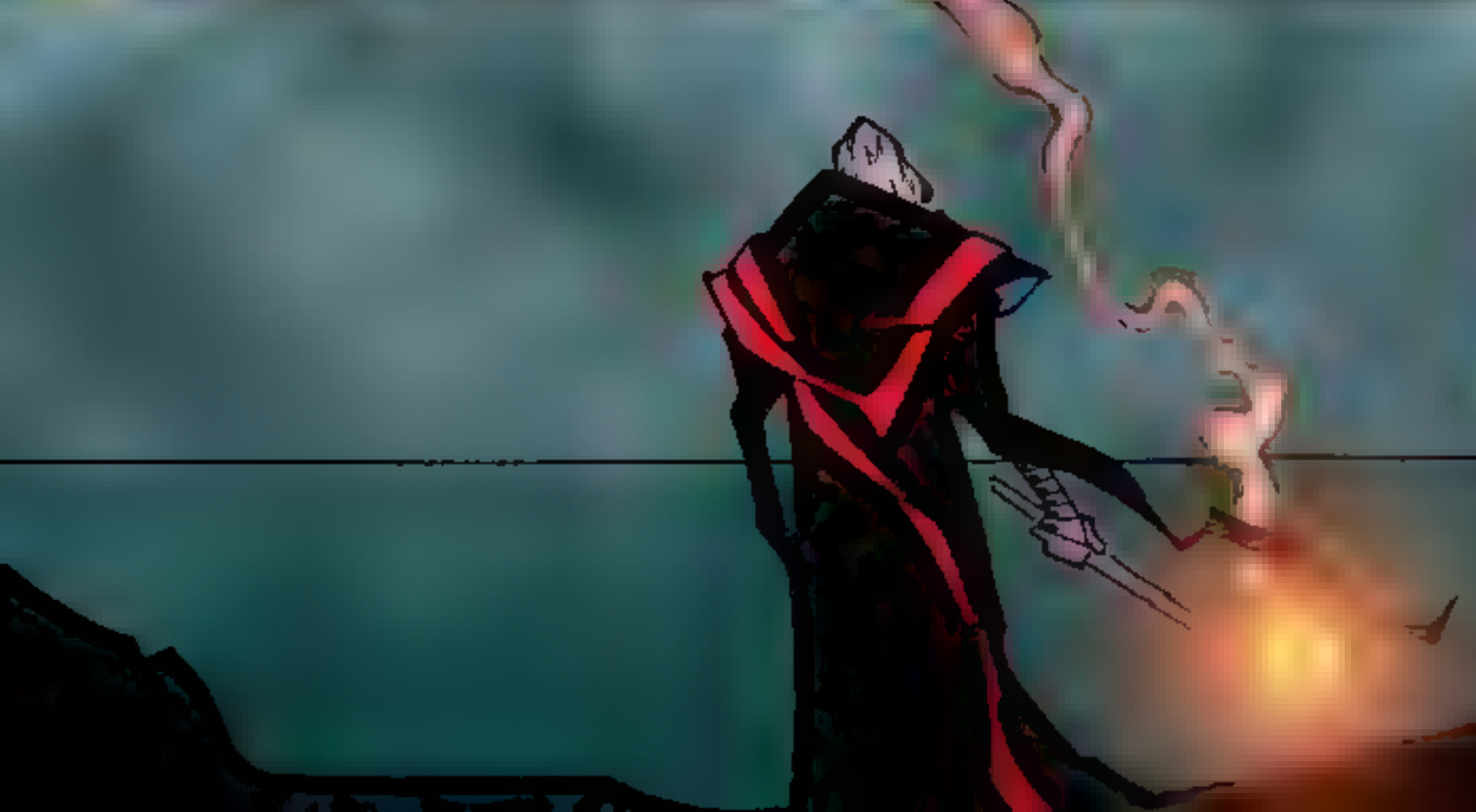
AWAY, SISTERS!



ATEEEEEEEEE!



HUMPH.



THERE ARE OTHER, MORE **POWERFUL** BEINGS AWAITING HIM IN THE DARKNESS, BUT EKIMUS KNOWS HE MUST GO ON... WHAT CHOICE DOES HE HAVE?

BESIDES, THE **RIVER** IS JUST AHEAD...

...THE RIVER STYX.



EKIMUS.
LONG HAS YOUR COMING
BEEN ANTICIPATED.

BUT YOU
ARE TOO EARLY,
THINK I--FOR ORDERS
ON YOUR PASSAGE
HAVE NOT YET BEEN
WRITTEN...



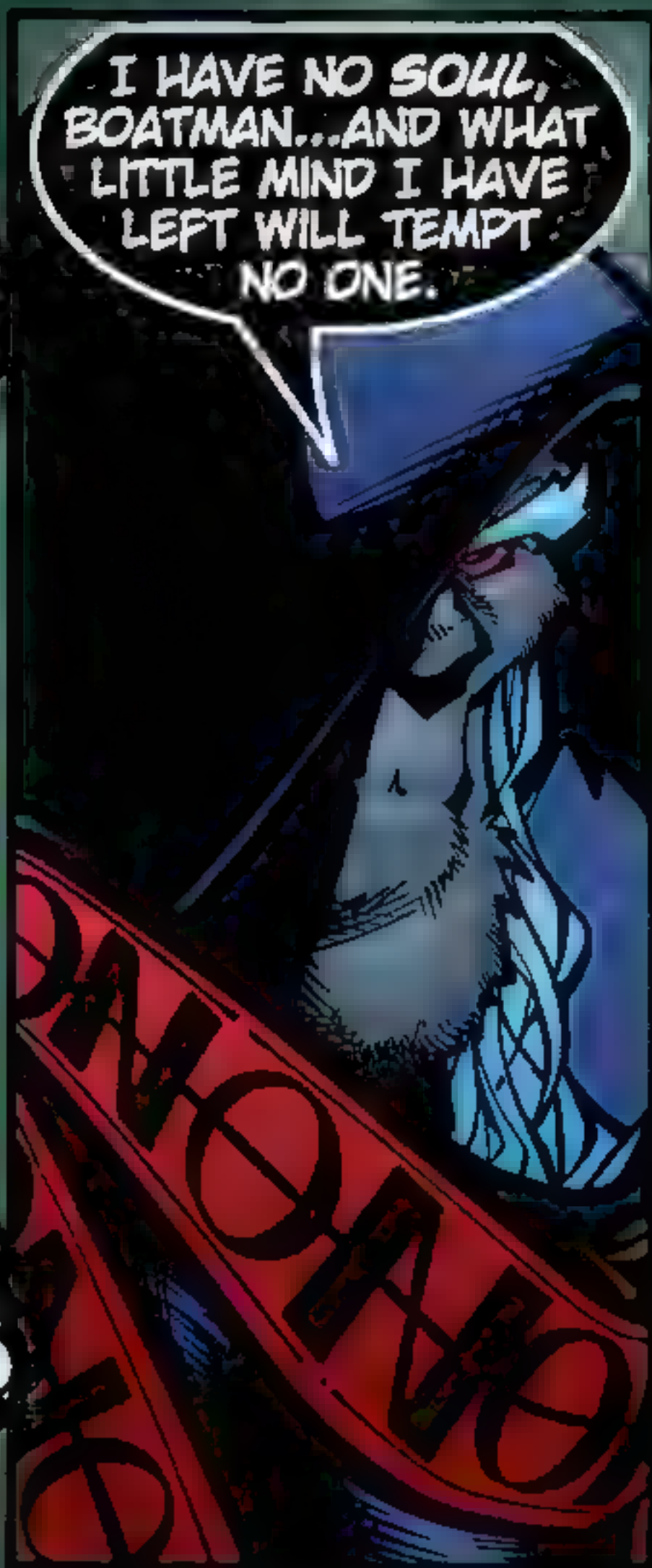
I KNOW,
CHARON I AM BOUND
BEYOND CERBERUS' GATE
NOW--I MUST GO
TO TARTARUS.



AH...TO THE
DRAGON, EH?

TO THAT DREADFUL
PLACE, I CAN
TRANSPORT YOU.

...BUT BEWARE--
SOULS AND MINDS ARE
CURRENCY. WHAT IS
LOST THERE CAN NOT
BE RECLAIMED!



I HAVE NO SOUL,
BOATMAN...AND WHAT
LITTLE MIND I HAVE
LEFT WILL TEMPT
NO ONE.



YET, SOME
PAYMENT I WILL
REQUIRE FOR THIS
CROSSING...



...THIS
VESTMENT
WILL DO, IF YOU
WILL YIELD IT.

IF THAT IS ALL
IT WILL COST, I GIVE
IT GLADLY.



GREATER
PRICES WILL BE EXACTED,
BE SURE. BUT DESTINY
DOES NOT BARTER
FOR...GOODS.



HARD TO BELIEVE ALL THIS IS LOCATED IN **NEW YORK**, EH? UNDER AND **BEHIND** WHAT THE DAYTIME WORLD EVER SEES!

I HOPE YOU **REALLY** WANT TO GO HERE, ALEX--'CAUSE THERE AIN'T NO TURNING BACK NOW!



HOW CAN ALL THIS BE--?!

BIG CITY GROWS UP FAST--AND LEAVES LOTS OF **FORGOTTEN** NOOKS AND CRANNIES. DARKLINGS ARE DRAWN TO THESE PLACES.

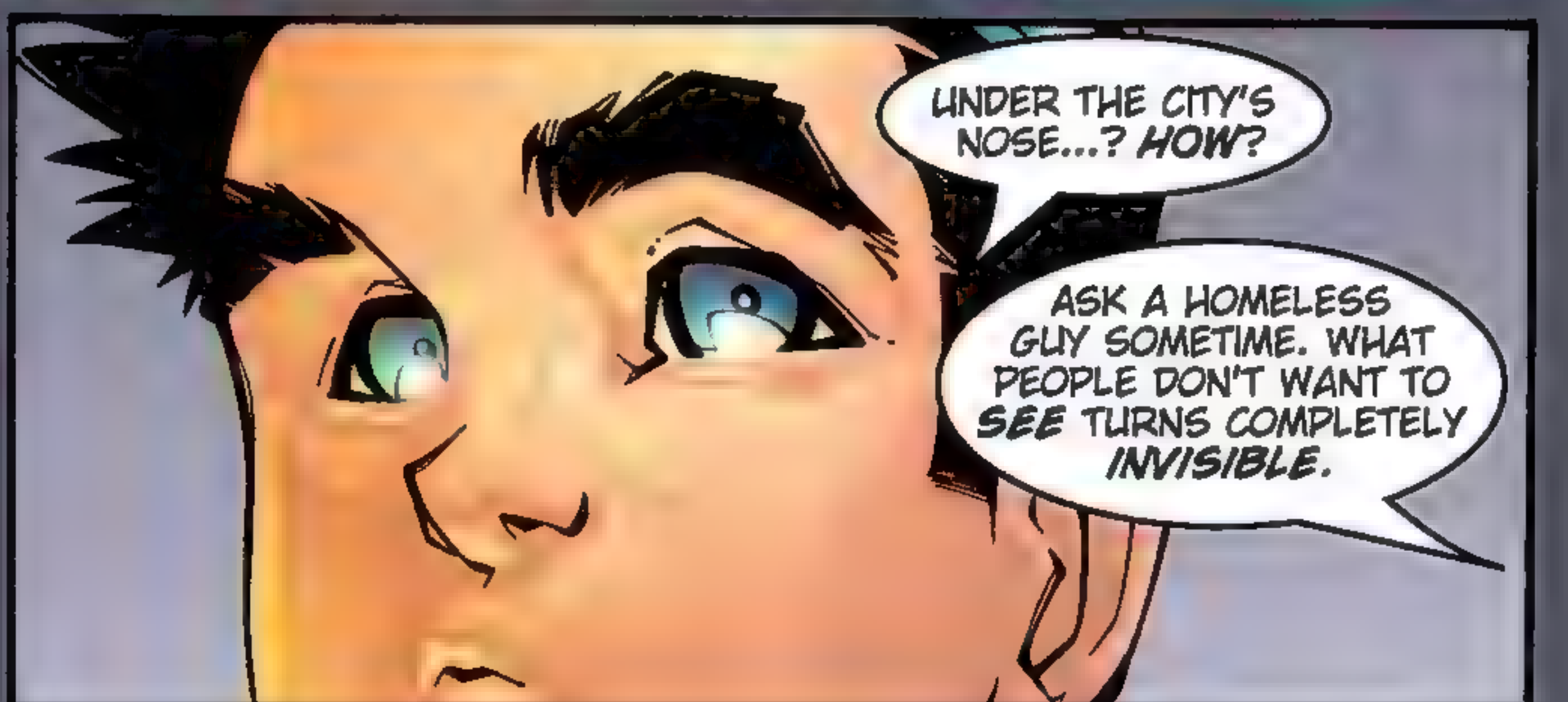


THIS IS A **CROSSROADS** BETWEEN THE NIGHT AND DAY REALITIES, YOU'LL FIND VAMPS, AND WOLVES AND **FALLEN HUMANS...AND STRANGERS!**



A SEPARATE **CIVILIZATION** HAS GROWN HERE, WITH ITS OWN RULES AND SYSTEMS...

...LIFE'S NOT GLAMOROUS, BUT IT'S MOSTLY **SAFE.**



UNDER THE CITY'S NOSE...? HOW?

ASK A HOMELESS GUY SOMETIME. WHAT PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO **SEE** TURNS COMPLETELY **INVISIBLE.**

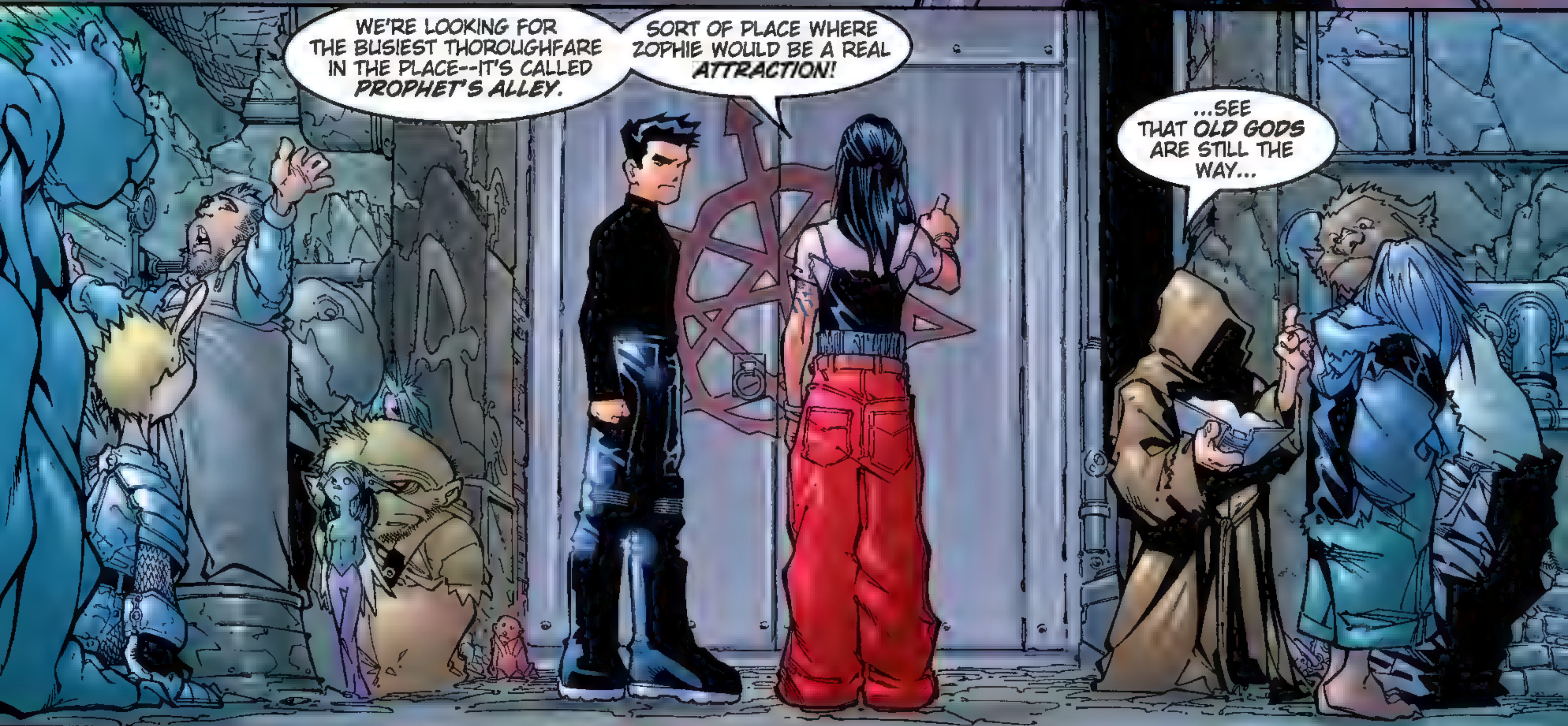


SO, WELCOME
TO **SHEOL CITY**, WHERE
THE REJECTED AND
DEJECTED EVENTUALLY
WIND UP...

WATCH IT,
POINDEXTER.

... **AHEM**--AS I
WAS SAYING, **HERE**,
EVERYONE IS **EQUAL**--
NO ONE **JUDGES**
ANYONE ELSE.

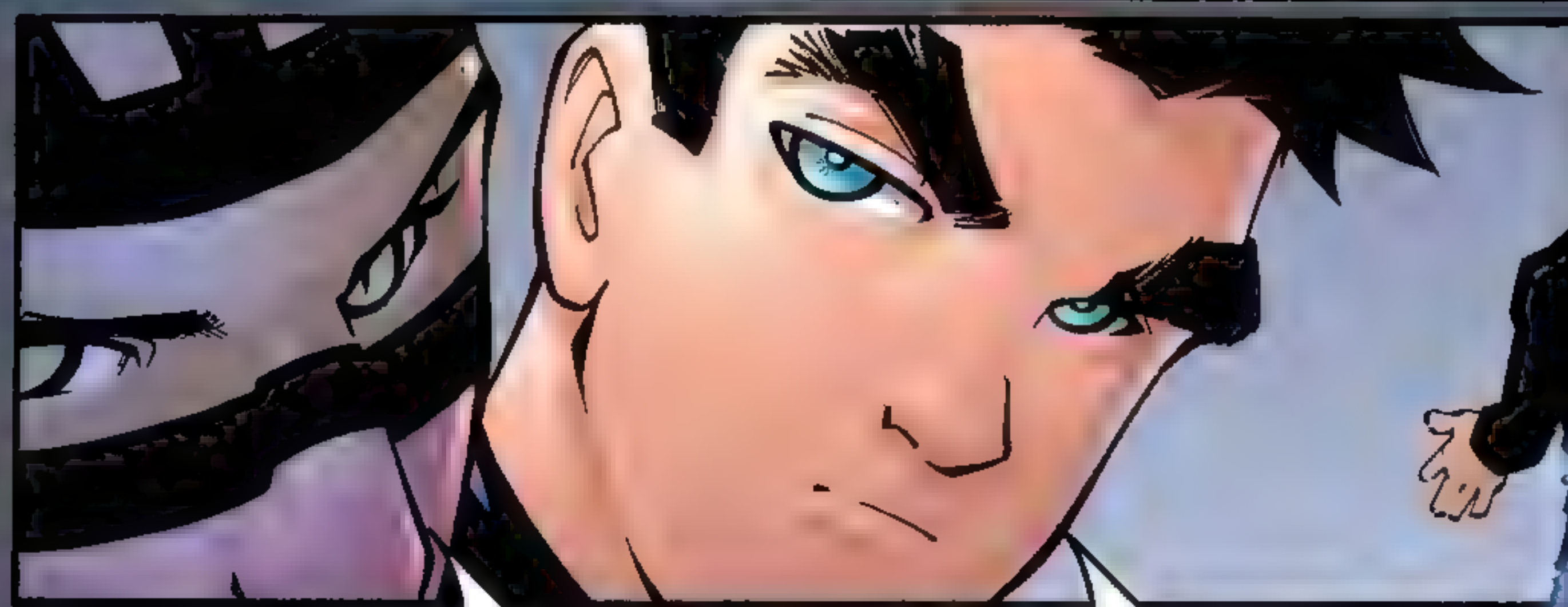
SO EIGHTY-SIX
THE 'TUDE, BOBO.



WE'RE LOOKING FOR
THE BUSIEST THOROUGHFARE
IN THE PLACE--IT'S CALLED
PROPHET'S ALLEY.

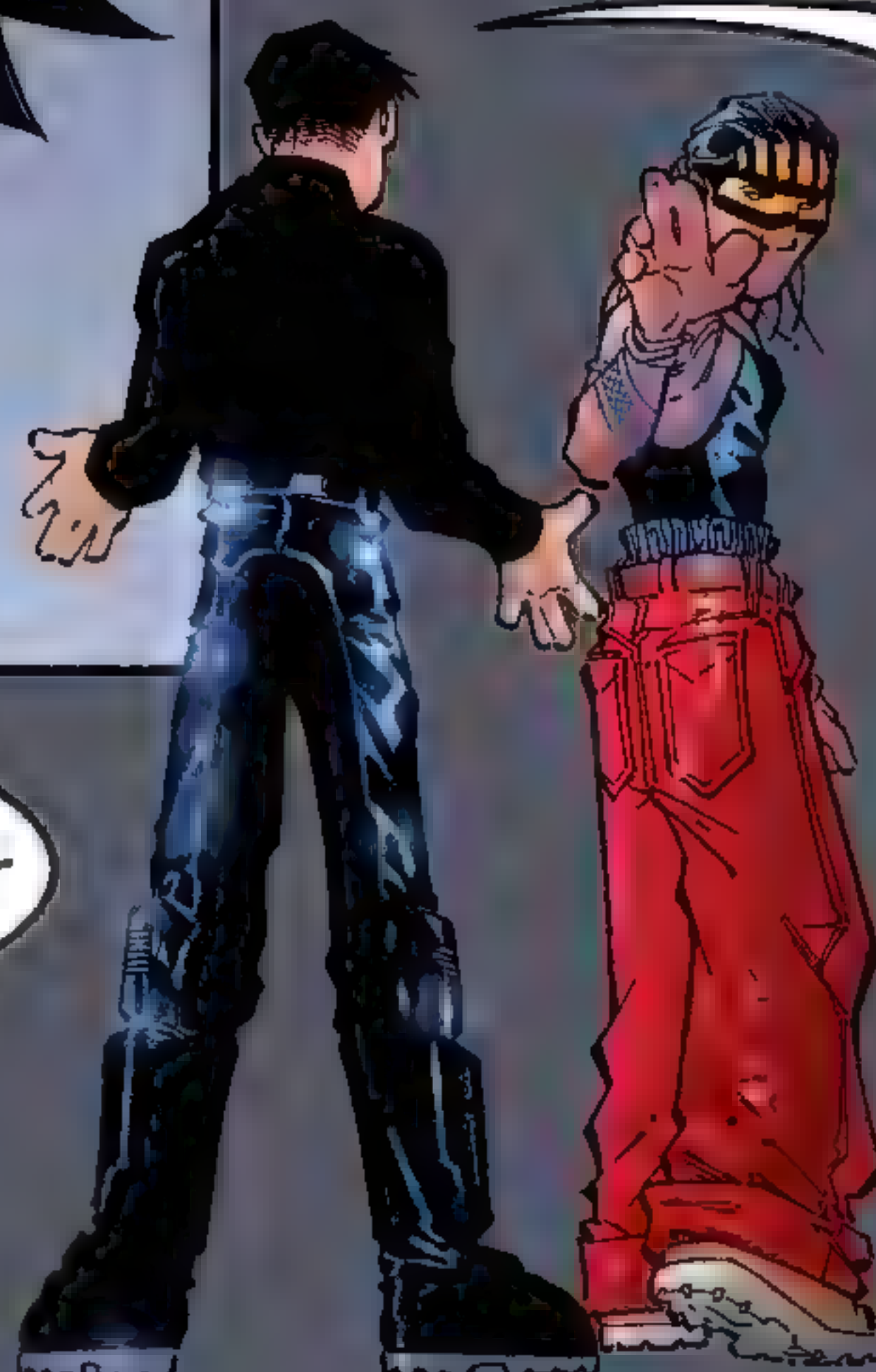
SORT OF PLACE WHERE
ZOPHIE WOULD BE A REAL
ATTRACTION!

...SEE
THAT **OLD GODS**
ARE STILL THE
WAY...



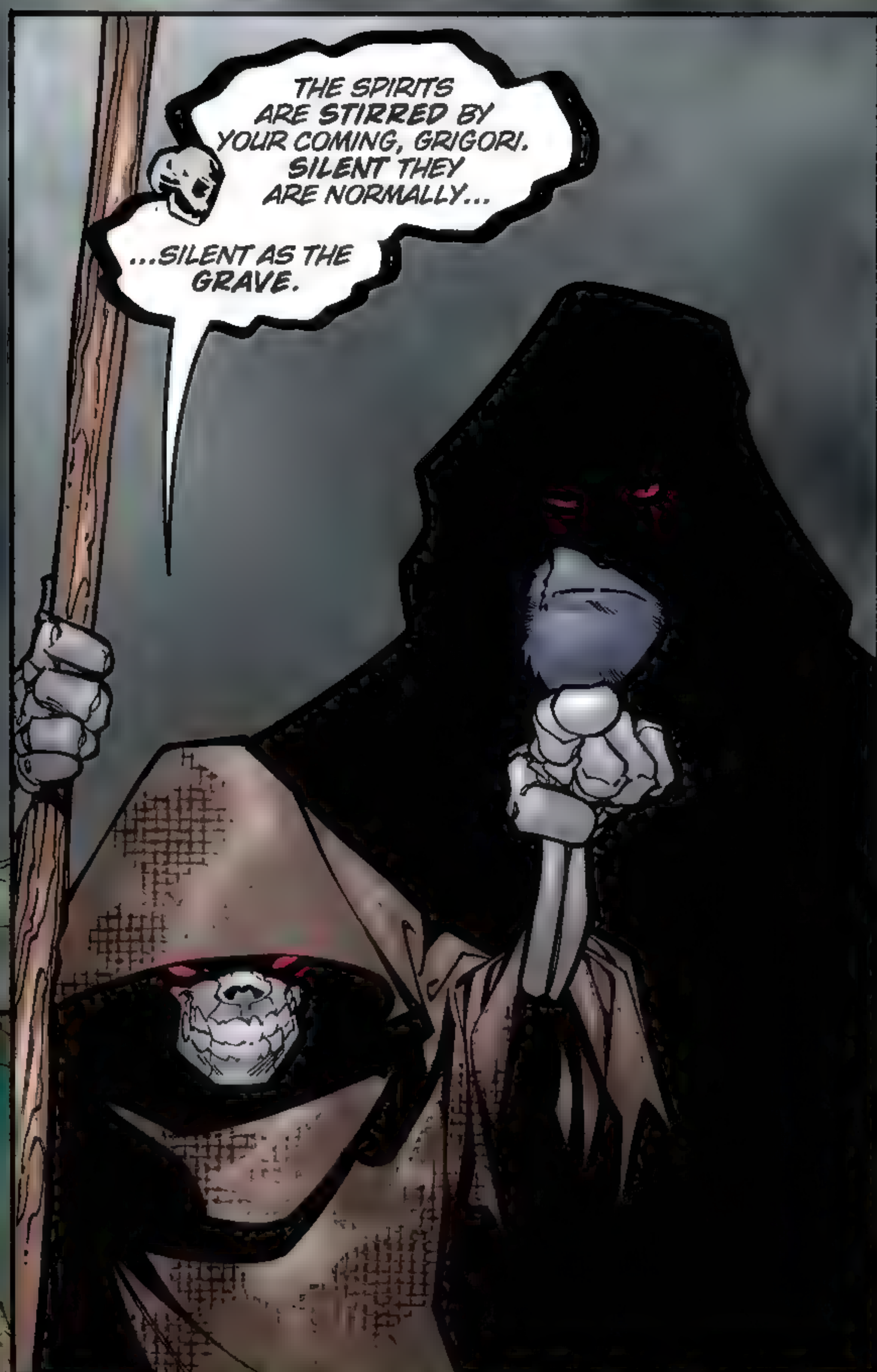
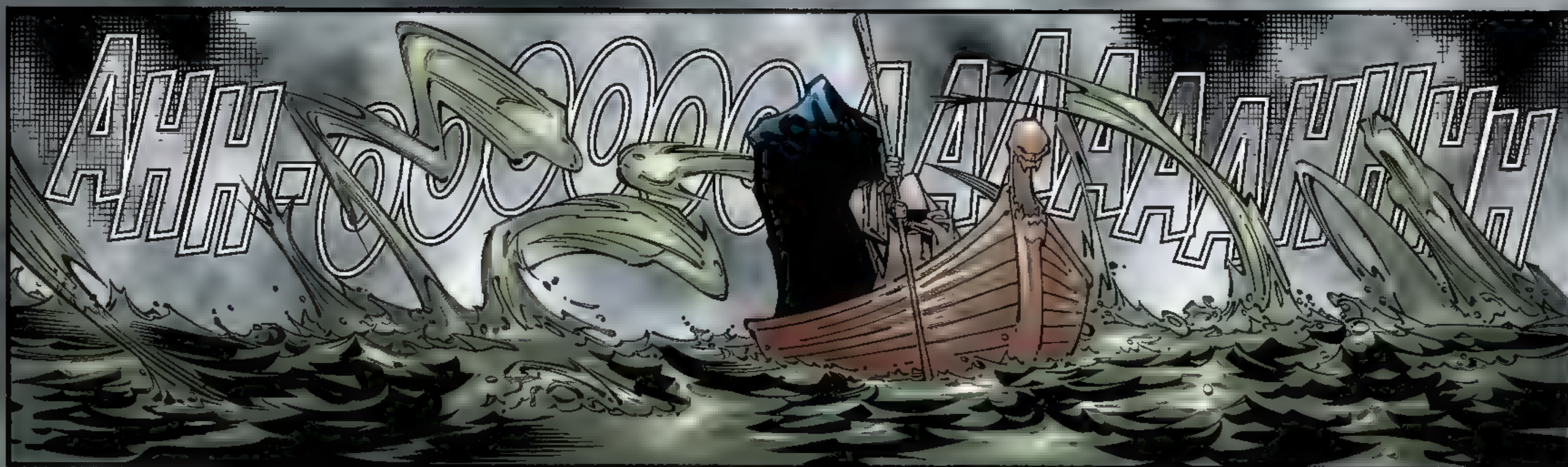
LOTS OF
PHONY RELIGIONS
FLOURISH HERE--SELLING
THE HOPE OF SALVATION TO
THE **HOPELESS**...

WHY DO
THESE **LOSERS** PUT UP
WITH ALL THIS **EXPLOITATION**--
CAN'T THEY JUST
LEAVE...?



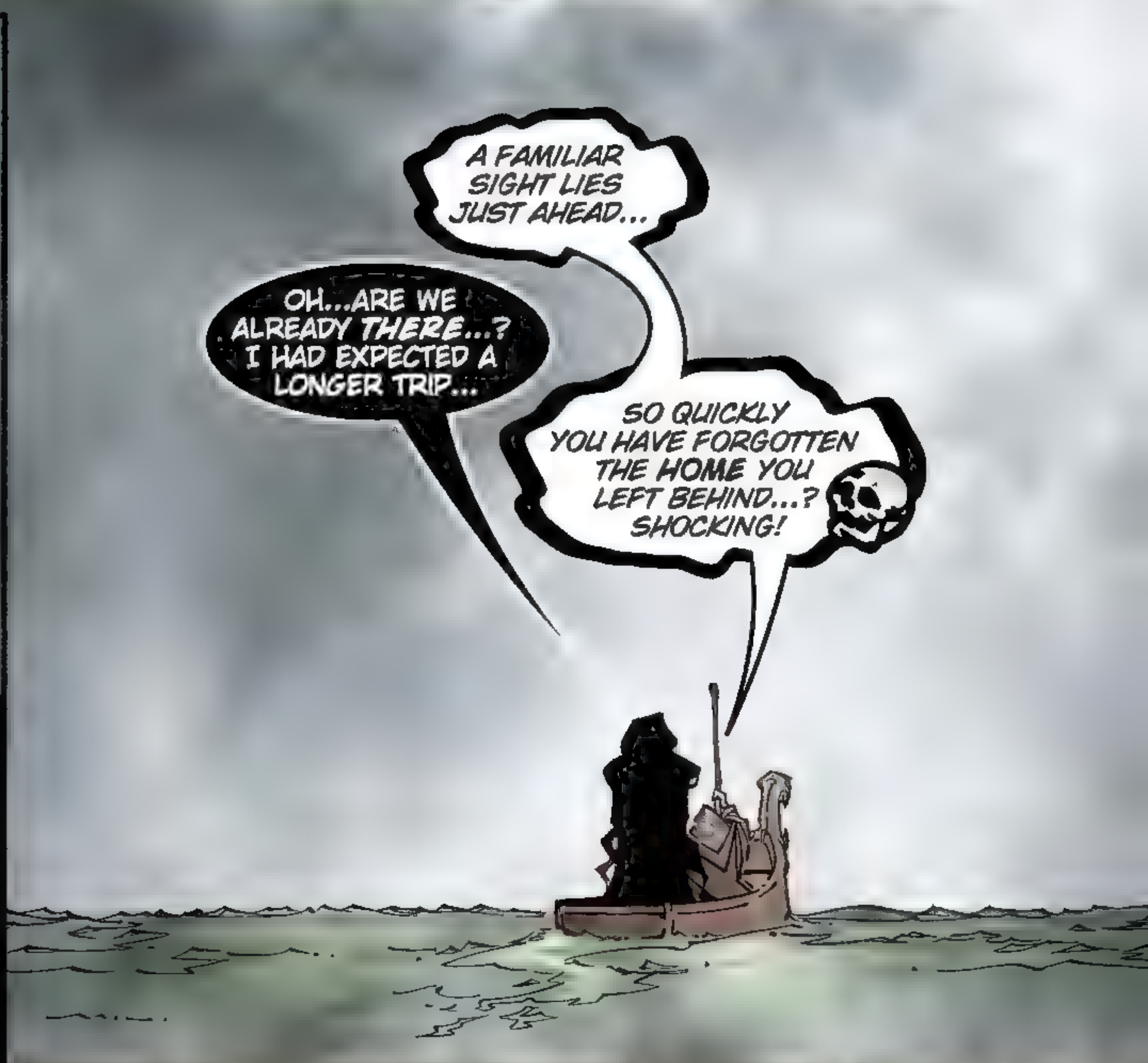
WHAT?!
WHAT DID I SAY--?!

YOU'RE STILL
PRETTY **YUPPITY**
FOR A **VAMPIRE**, BOBO--
TRY NOT TO BE SO
SUPERIOR, HEY?



THE SPIRITS
ARE STIRRED BY
YOUR COMING, GRIGORI.
SILENT THEY
ARE NORMALLY...

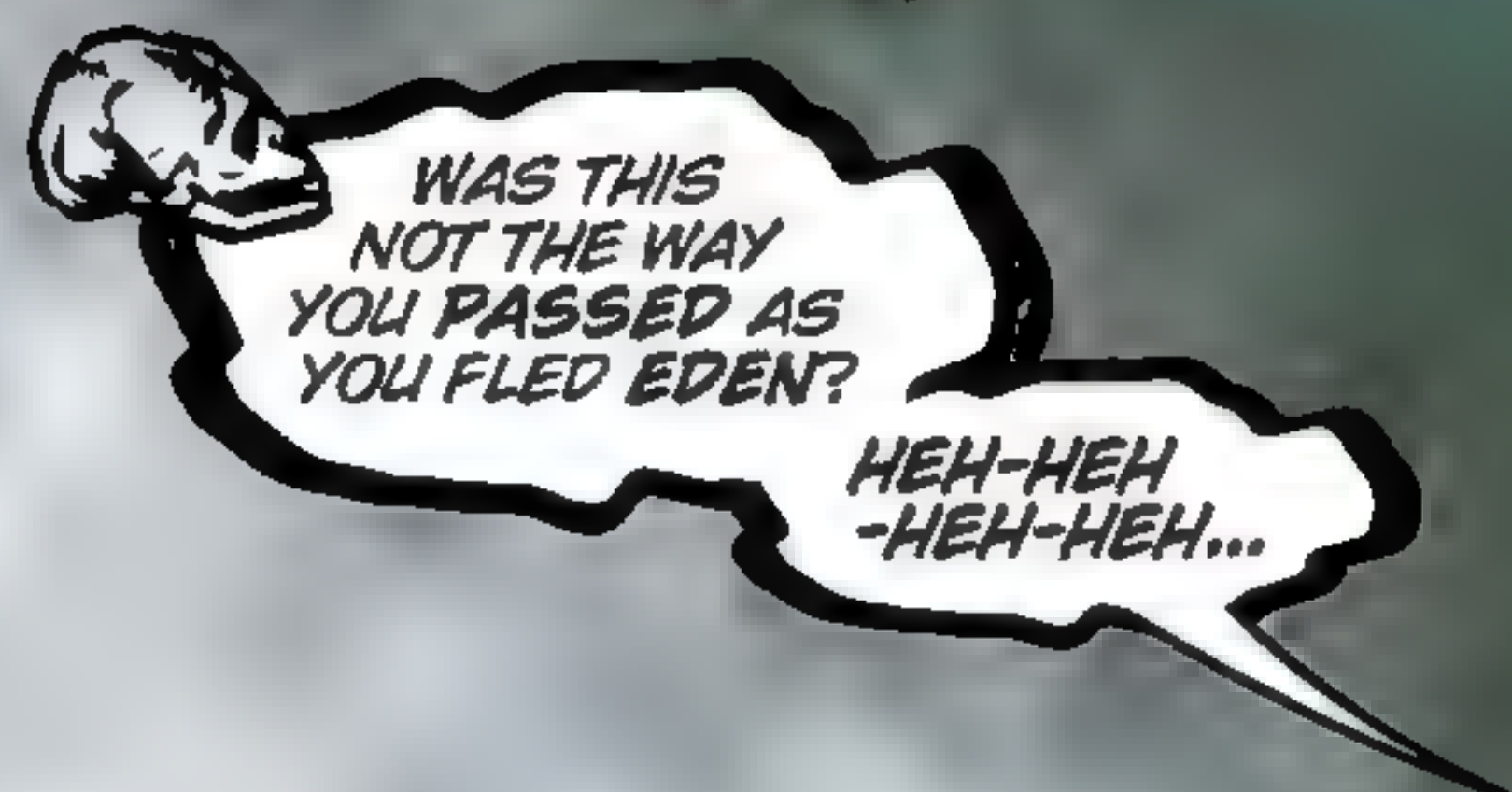
...SILENT AS THE
GRAVE.



A FAMILIAR
SIGHT LIES
JUST AHEAD...

OH...ARE WE
ALREADY THERE...?
I HAD EXPECTED A
LONGER TRIP...

SO QUICKLY
YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN
THE HOME YOU
LEFT BEHIND...?
SHOCKING!



WAS THIS
NOT THE WAY
YOU PASSED AS
YOU FLED EDEN?

HEH-HEH
-HEH-HEH...

ABANDON ALL hope ye
who enter here ye



THAT WAS AN ETERNITY AGO... AND MEMORY DULLS WITH TIME.



YES, BUT YOUR MEMORY REMAINS AS SHARP AS PAIN, DOES IT NOT?

ALL TOO WELL CAN YOU SUMMON THAT MOMENT WHEN YOU LOST PARADISE, EH?

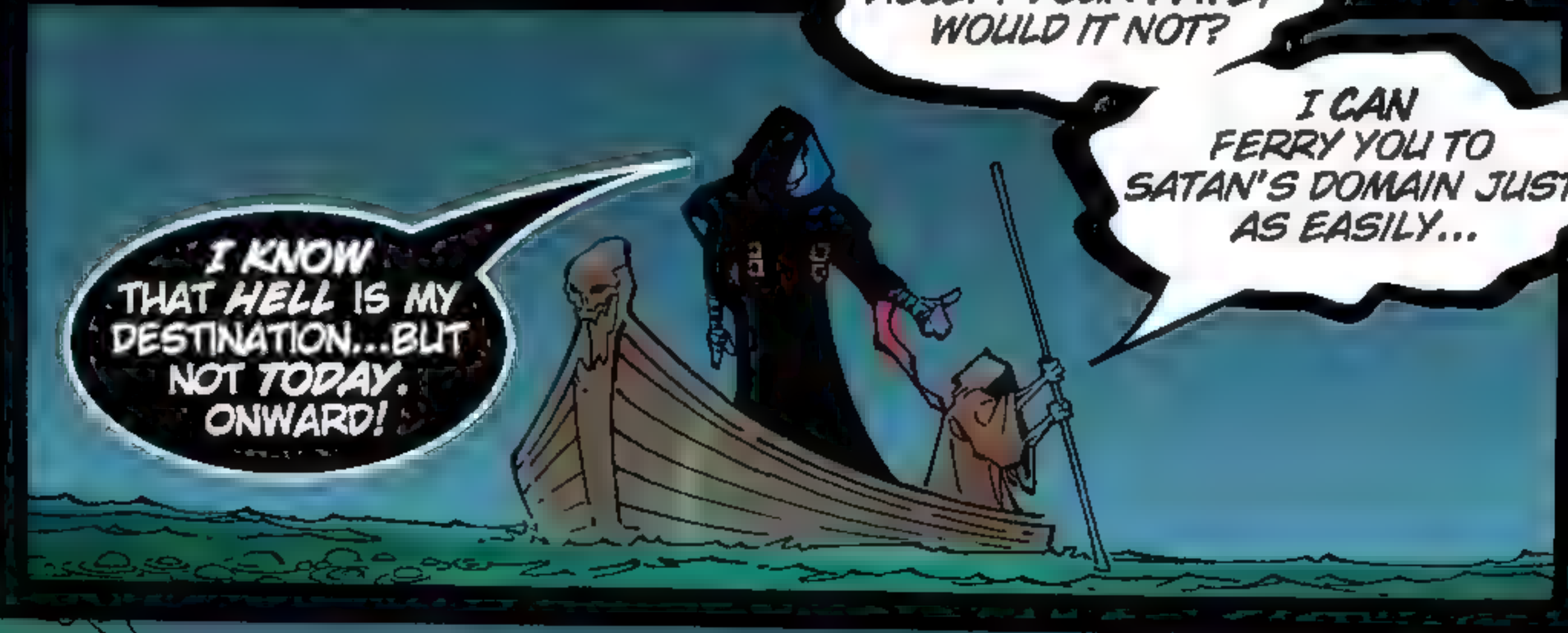


I REMEMBER BEST THE CHOICE OF FIGHTING AT LUCIFER'S SIDE-- AGAINST HEAVEN AND GOD. I WAS A FOOL, BUT MY EYES WERE WIDE OPEN.



WHAT?!

BURBLE- SPLISH-



I KNOW THAT HELL IS MY DESTINATION... BUT NOT TODAY. ONWARD!

I CAN FERRY YOU TO SATAN'S DOMAIN JUST AS EASILY...

IT WOULD BE MUCH EASIER TO ACCEPT YOUR FATE, WOULD IT NOT?



PERHAPS YOU WILL COME TO HADES THIS DAY AFTER ALL, OLD ALLY!

PERHAPS I WILL TAKE YOU THERE MYSELF!

SETH!



YES...WHILE
YOU WERE BANISHED,
I WAS CAST INTO
THE DEPTHS!



I DESIRE
YOUR COMPANY,
EKIMUS!

I THINK
NOT...

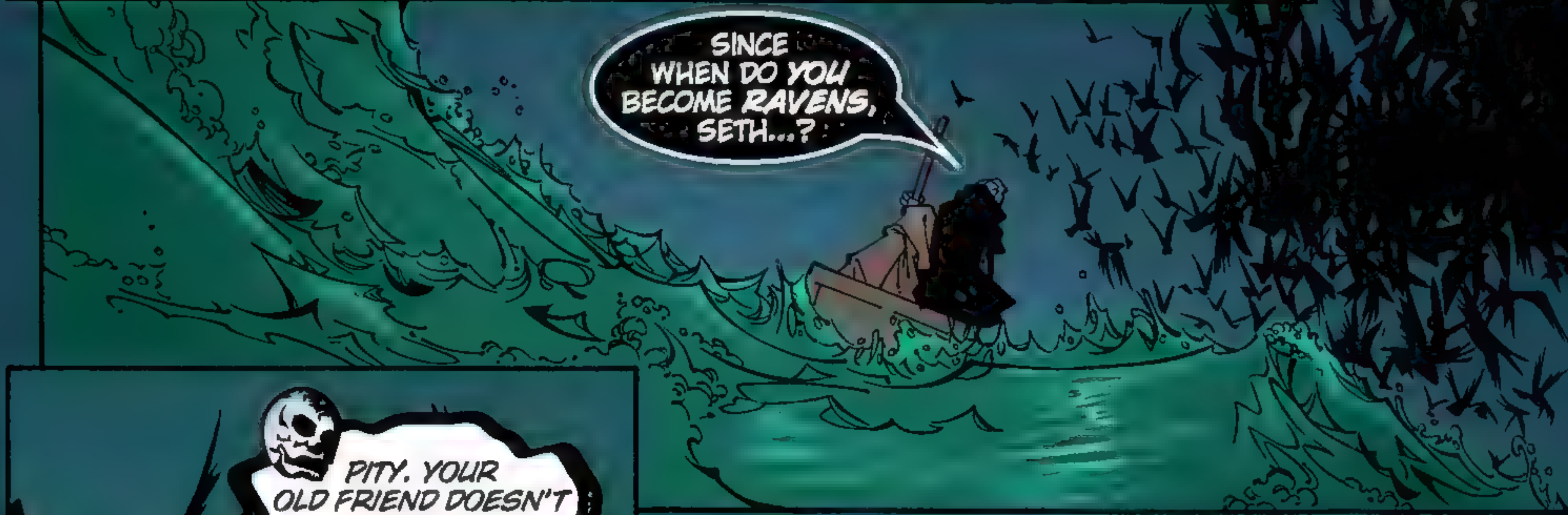


FLAME??
SINCE WHEN
DO YOU CAST
FLAME??

AAAAAAAAA



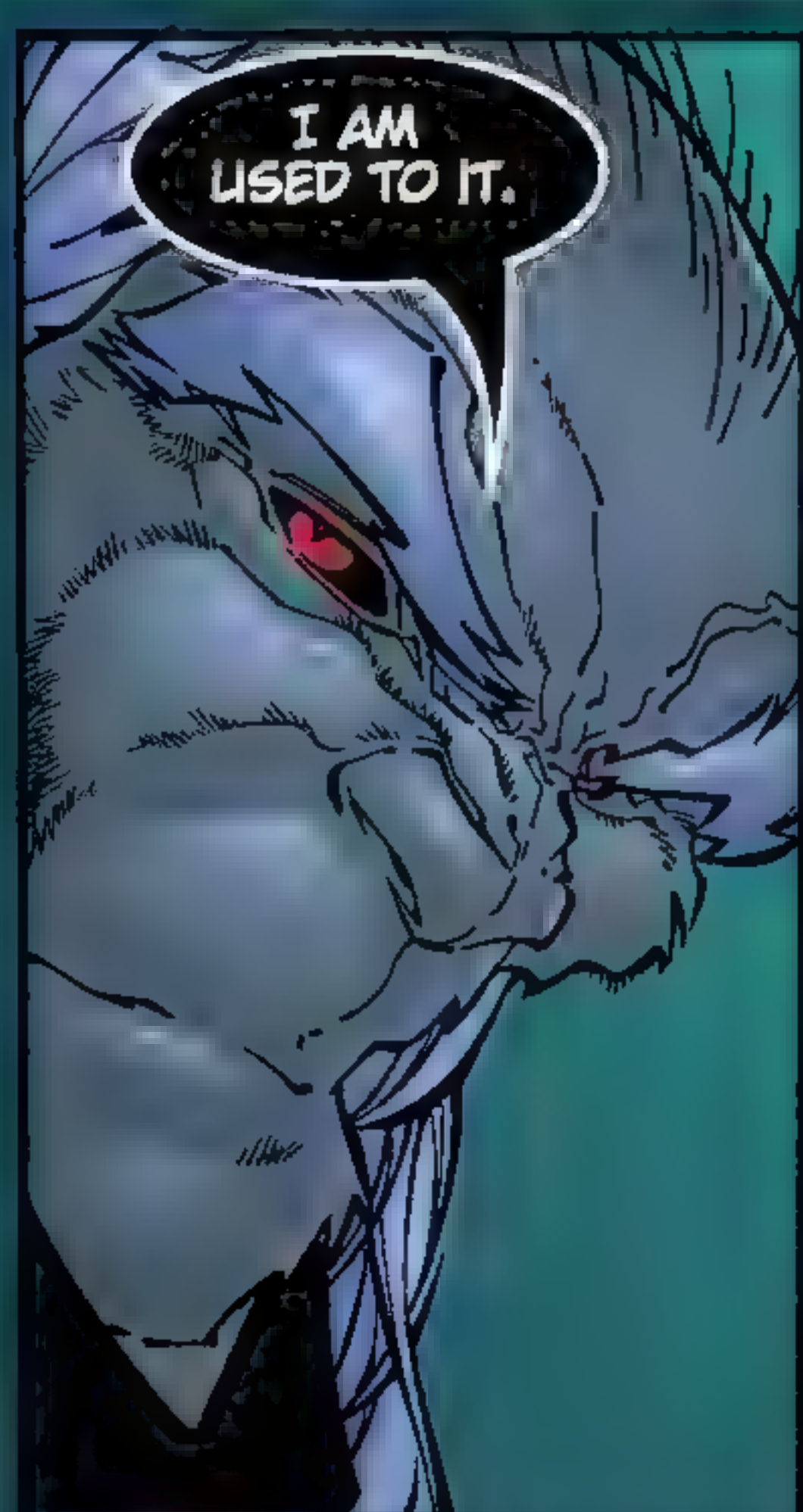
WAAAAHHHHH



SINCE
WHEN DO YOU
BECOME RAVENS,
SETH...?



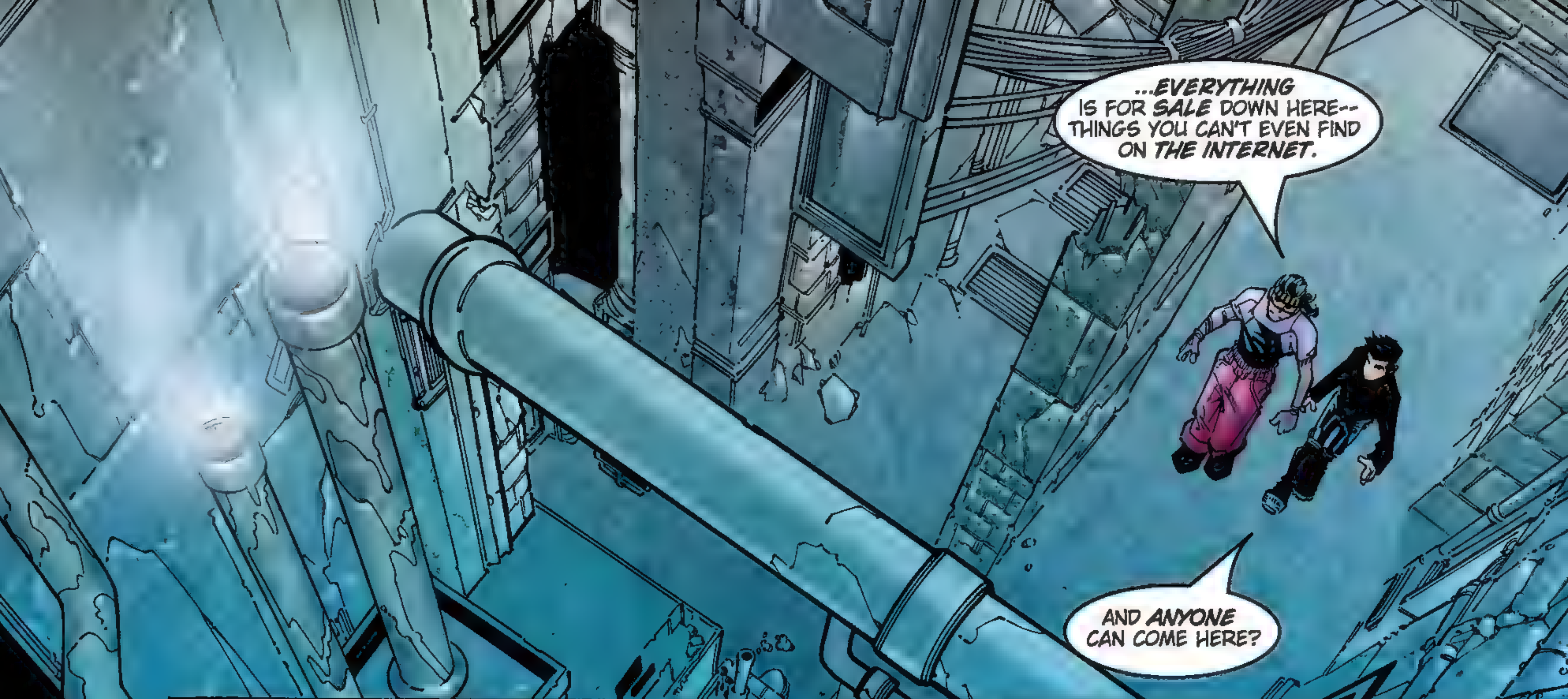
**PITY. YOUR
OLD FRIEND DOESN'T
LIKE YOU.**



I AM
USED TO IT.



LET'S MOVE...



...EVERYTHING IS FOR SALE DOWN HERE-- THINGS YOU CAN'T EVEN FIND ON THE INTERNET.

AND ANYONE CAN COME HERE?



ANYONE. BUT ONLY THOSE WHO KNOW HOW CAN LEAVE. MANY NEVER DO.

WHEN HOPE AND FAITH DIE, RAGE AND HATRED BLOOM IN THEIR PLACE...



...IT'S A ROTTEN PLACE TO BE STRANDED --AND F'GET ABOUT GETTING A CAB!

RAHH!

SKREEE!



THE CHOSEN ONE IS HERE?!

YOU'RE BEING NOTICED. PRO'LLY STIRRING SOME EMBERS OF HOPE...



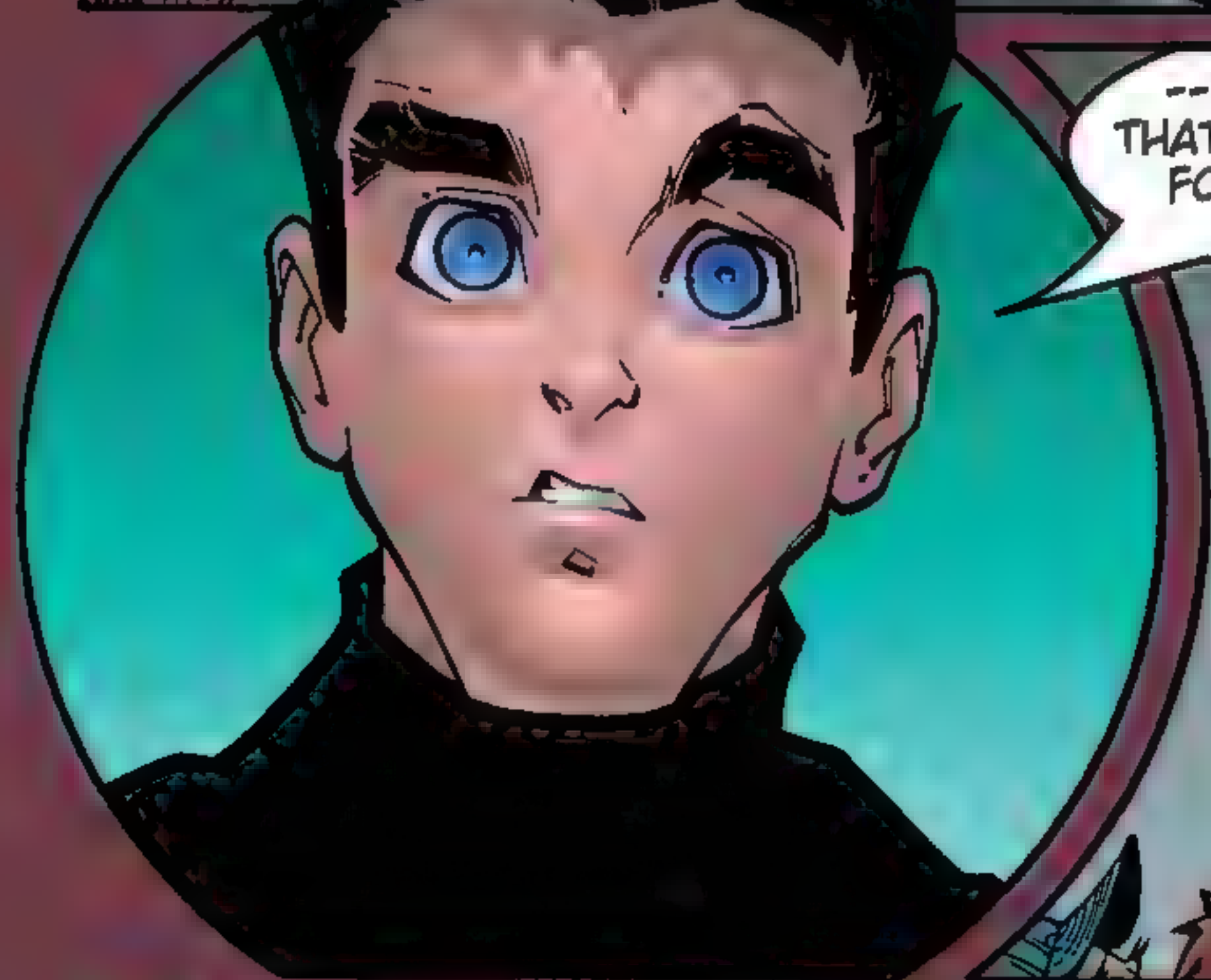
...YOU MIGHT EVEN HAVE SOME FRIENDS HERE...



WHOA...
CHECK OUT
THE CROWD!

MUST BE
PROPHET'S ALLEY--
EVERYONE COMES
HERE.

Holy!



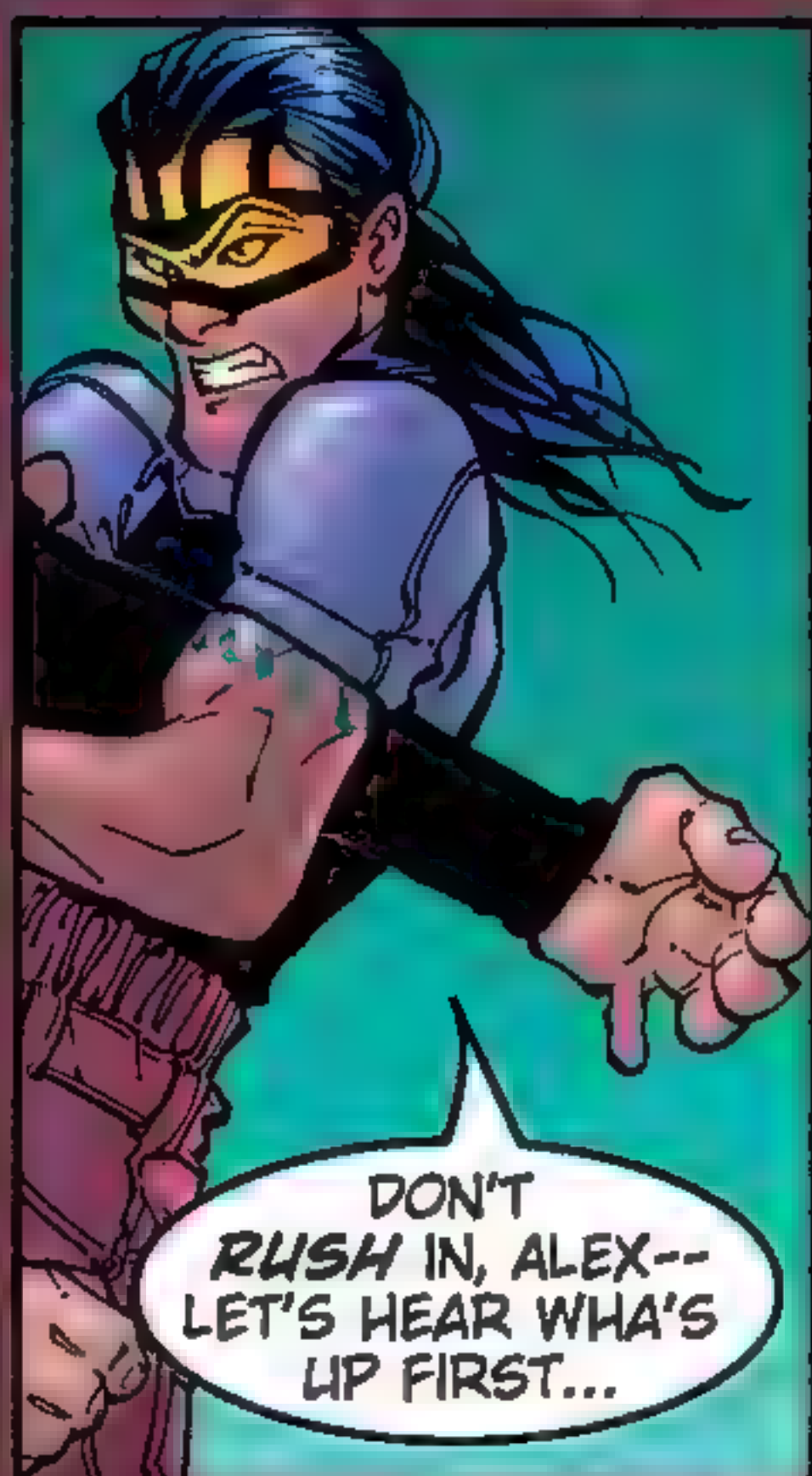
--IT'S ZOPHIE! AND
THAT GUY WHO WORKED
FOR THE ORDER OF
THE DRAGON!*

...HUMANS ARE
TOO COMPLACENT TO
LEARN FAITH--TO BELIEVE
IN ANYTHING BUT
THEMSELVES!

*See CRIMSON #13.--Scott.



ZOPHIE--I'LL--



DON'T
RUSH IN, ALEX--
LET'S HEAR WHA'S
UP FIRST...



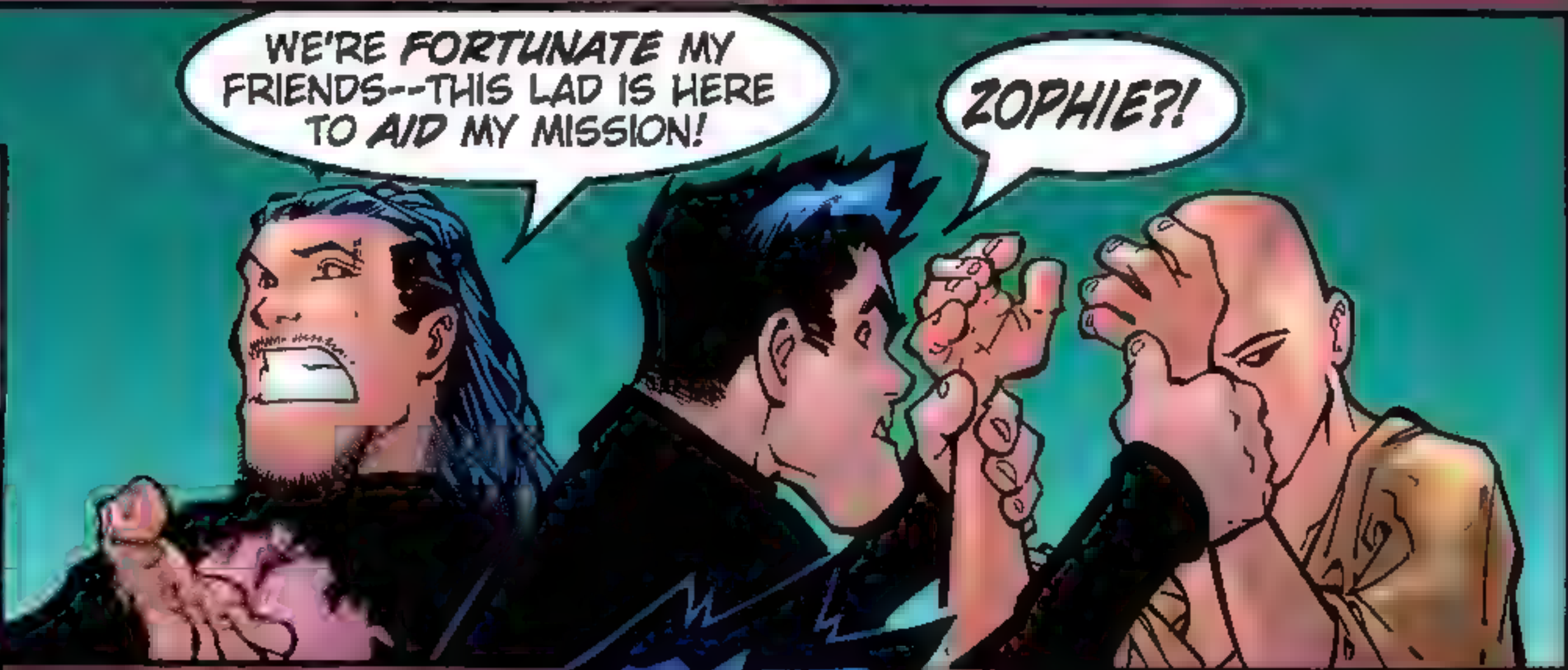
THE UNBELIEVERS
WOULD RATHER KILL
THE MESSAGE THAN ADMIT
THEY ARE *WRONG*! THEY
DOOM THEMSELVES AND
THEIR WORLD!



HE LIES! I'VE SEEN
HIM KILL OUR KIND
WITHOUT MERCY!

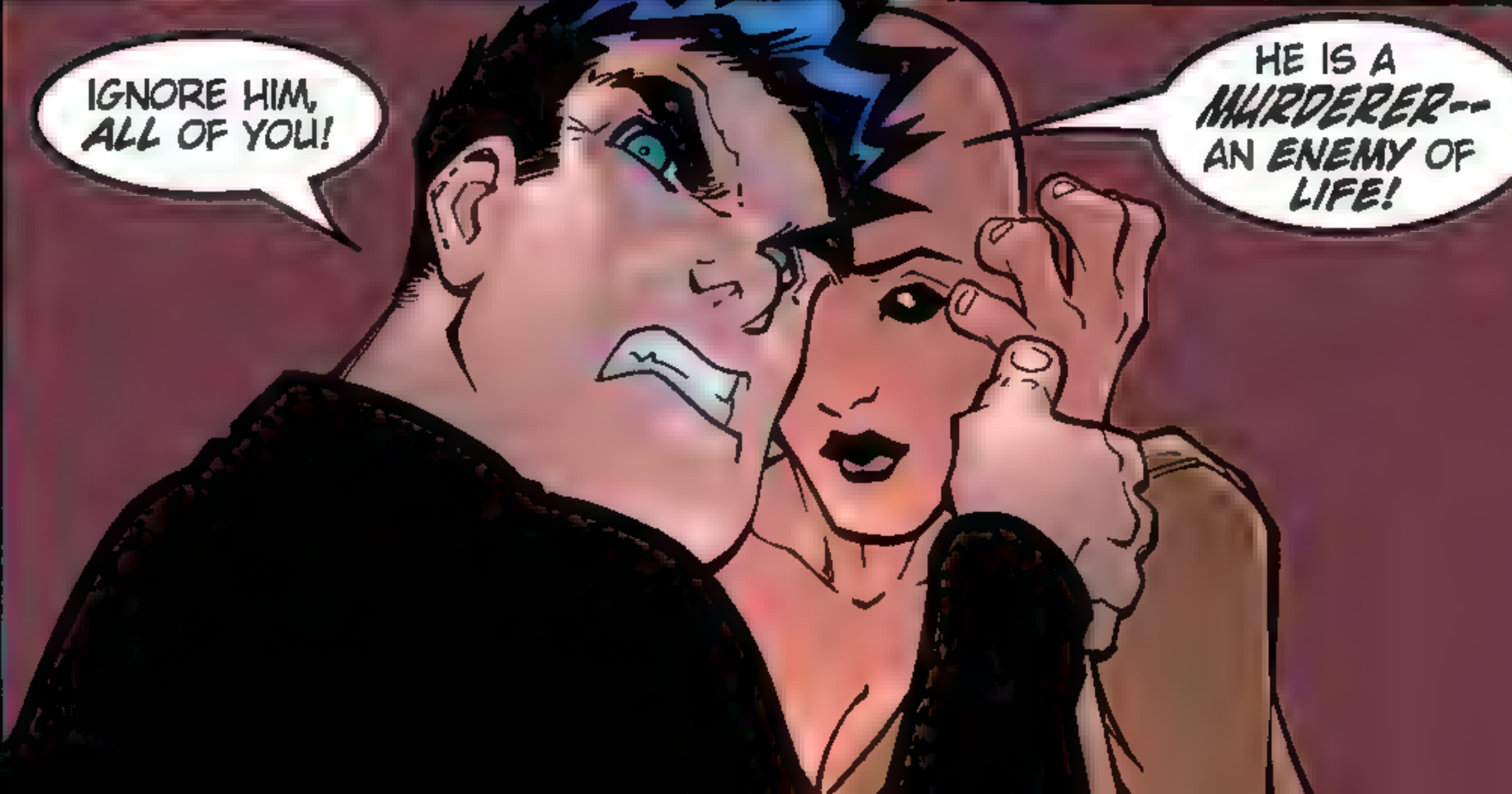


YES, BUT I
HAVE HAD A *DIVINE*
CONVERSION FROM
MY OLD WAYS! I SERVE
THE CREATOR NOW!
DON'T YOU,
CHOSEN ONE?



WE'RE FORTUNATE MY
FRIENDS--THIS LAD IS HERE
TO AID MY MISSION!

ZOPHIE?!



IGNORE HIM,
ALL OF YOU!

HE IS A
MURDERER--
AN ENEMY OF
LIFE!



I FEAR THAT THE CHOSEN ONE HAS BEEN CO-OPTED BY THE OTHER SIDE!

HE MAY NEED AN EXORCISM!

TAN!!
TAN!!
TAN!!



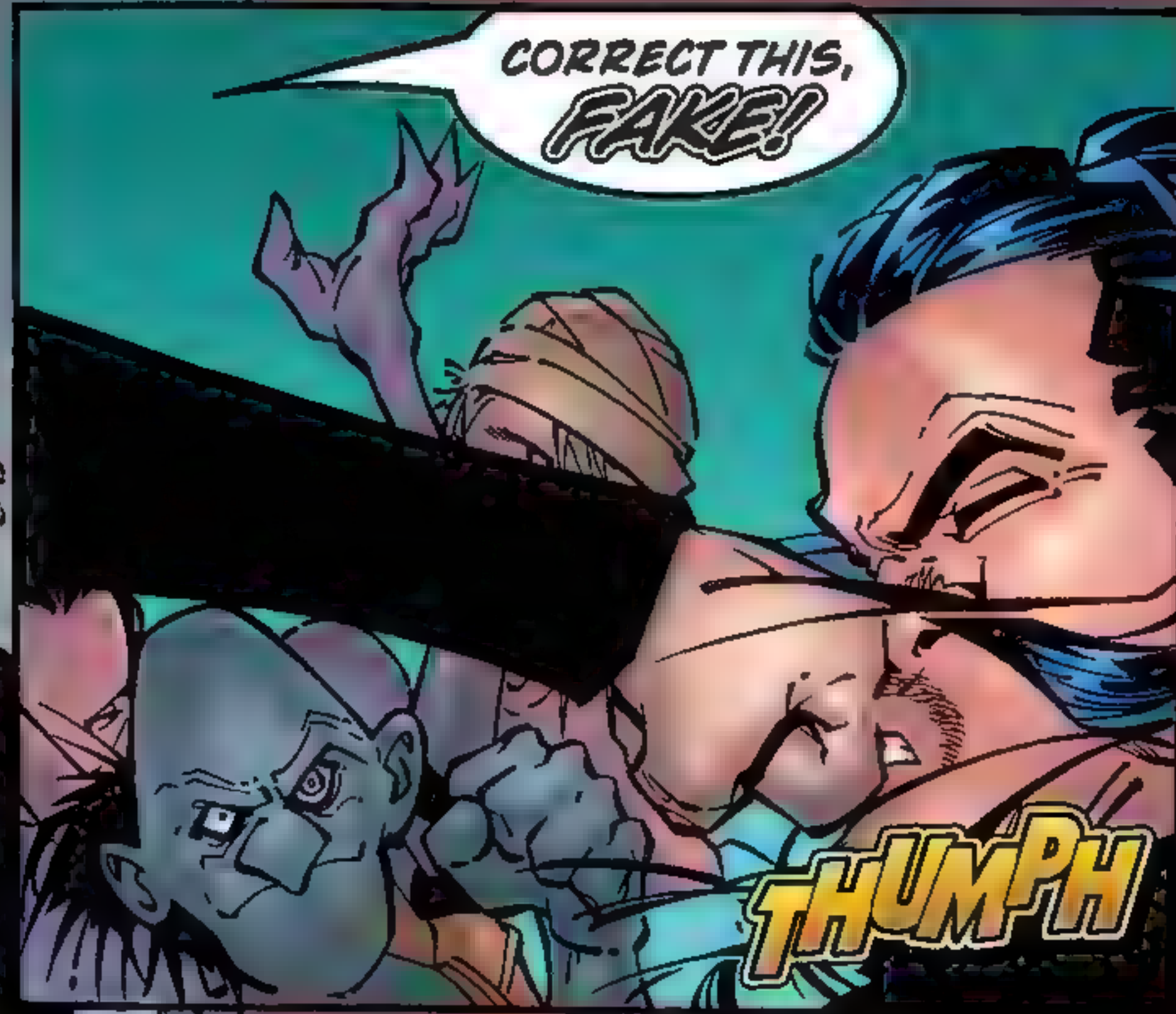
GET HIM!

HEY!
LEAVE ME--!



GENTLY, BELOVED--
THE LORD HAS NEED
OF THIS ONE!

HE ONLY NEEDS A
STERN CORRECTION
TO SEE THE WAY!



CORRECT THIS,
FAKE!

THUMPH



IF HE'S NOT
THE ONE--YOU MUST
TEACH US! BRING
US REDEMPTION!

NO!
I'M NOT
THE MESSIAH,
EITHER



THINK
FOR YOURSELVES!
UMPH--STOP!

TEACH US!



AH...YOUR
JUDGMENT!

ZWOOSH

NORTHERN MAINE.

...?

GET OUT!

grrrrr



DUMAS?!

YES, SCARLET
THINBAULT.

YOUR...
BROTHERS WISH
YOU AWAKE--THEY ARE GLAD
THAT RED RIDING HOOD HAS
FINALLY COME HOME TO
THEIR WOOD...HEH.

UNLESS
YOU WANT THE PACK
THINNED, DON'T SEND
THEM TO WAKE
ME AGAIN!

FINE...I ONLY
CAME TO TELL YOU
TO GATHER YOUR
THINGS...

A **SIGN**
HAS COME--IT'S TIME
TO GO TO GRANDMA'S
HOUSE...

...IN
NEW YORK!

WHAT...?



WHO
THREW THIS?!!

BLISSH

THIS ONE
SENT THE FIRE, BOY!
YOU MAY HAVE REJECTED
YOUR HEAVENLY CALL, BUT
HE HAS NOT!!

HE IS
ANOINTED--HE IS
OUR SAVIOUR!



YUM!!

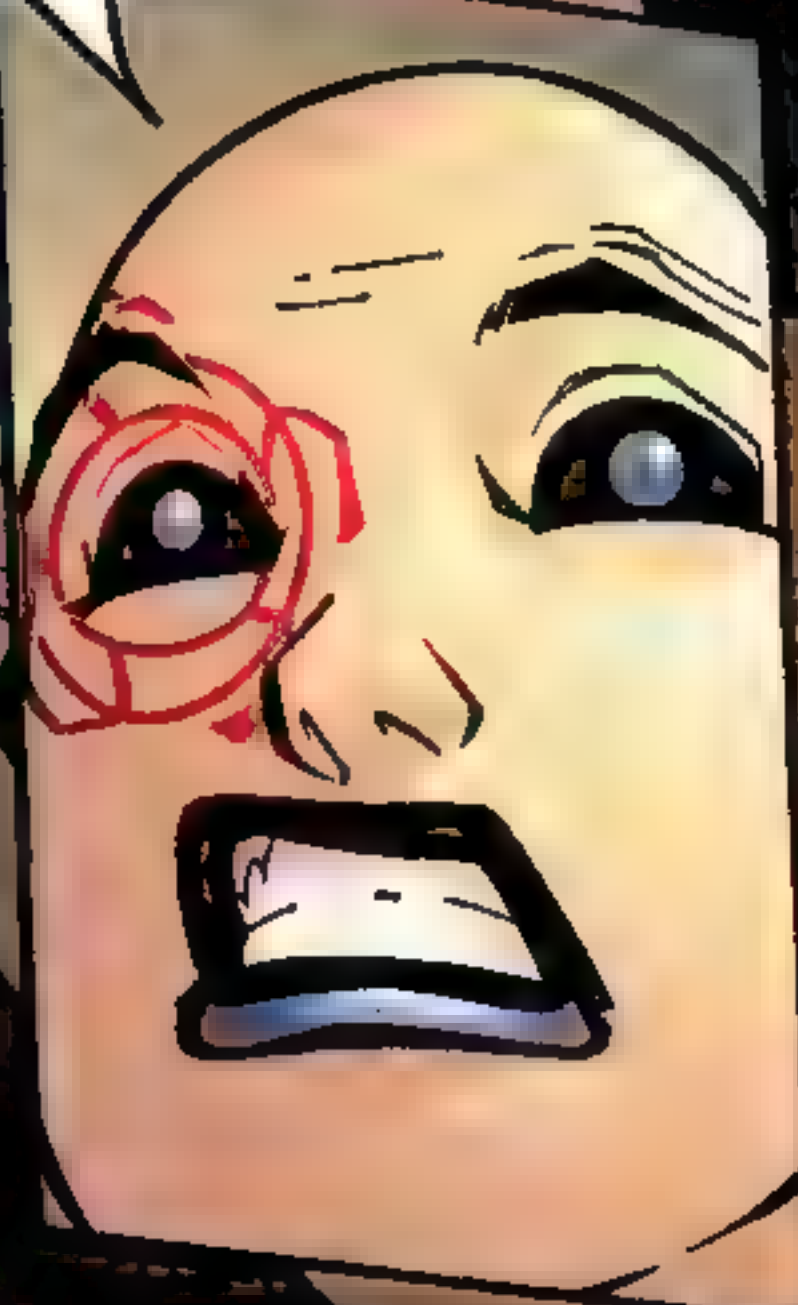
BLISSH



YOU'RE MINE,
NOW--DEVIL!



BROTHER
TAN--NO!!





BUT
HE'S NOT THE
ONLY ONE WHO CAN
SLING FLAME--!

OH,
BROTHER...



C'MON, ANGEL--
L'ES GET YOU OUTTA
HARM'S WAY!



STOP--
YOU'LL KILL THE
MASTER!

YES, I WILL--!

YOU TAKING
HIS MASTER DOWN
MUST'VE **SNIPPED**
THAT SAVIOUR'S
STRINGS.

WHATEVER...
LET'S GO,
ZOPHIE...

BUT...
BROTHER
TAN...?



THE BOY
WORKS FOR SATAN--
WE MUST STOP HIM, OR
LOSE OUR OWN
SOULS!



TAN--?!
I...I...UH...
UNNNHH!



I WONDER...
COULD THESE WATERS
DROWN EVEN ME? I COULD
END ALL MY PAIN WITH ONE
COLD PLUNGE...

TOO LATE
FOR SECOND THOUGHTS.
WE'RE HERE.

YES.
OF COURSE.

TARTARUS.

WHERE GOD'S
ANCIENT ENEMIES
ARE KEPT.

WILL I FIND
MY ANSWERS HERE,
I WONDER...?

UNKNOWN--
BUT ONCE YOU
LEAVE MY BOAT YOU
ARE COMMITTED--
YOU CAN NOT UNMAKE
THIS CHOICE.

I AM ALREADY
COMMITTED. UP THERE
RESIDES MY LAST
HOPE...

...EITHER MY
QUEST SUCCEEDS, OR
EVIL WILL CONSUME
THE WORLD...

HAVE TO
BELIEVE ALL THIS IS
LOCATED IN NEW YORK
UNDER AND BEHIND THE
THE DAYTIME WORLD
EVER SEEN!

YOU CAN
TO GO HERE
THERE ARE
AND

WILL
AND



AND

AND

AND

AND

AND

AND

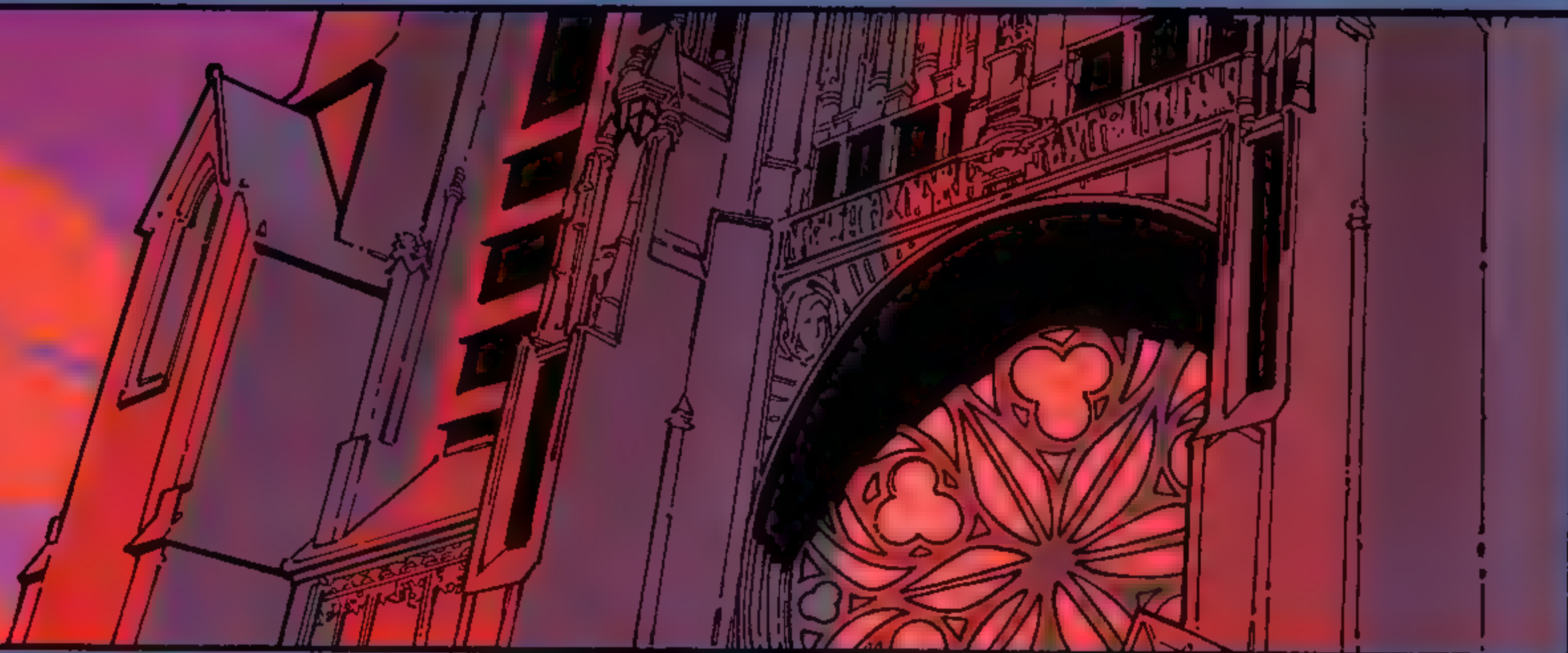
AND



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

VALE OF TEARS

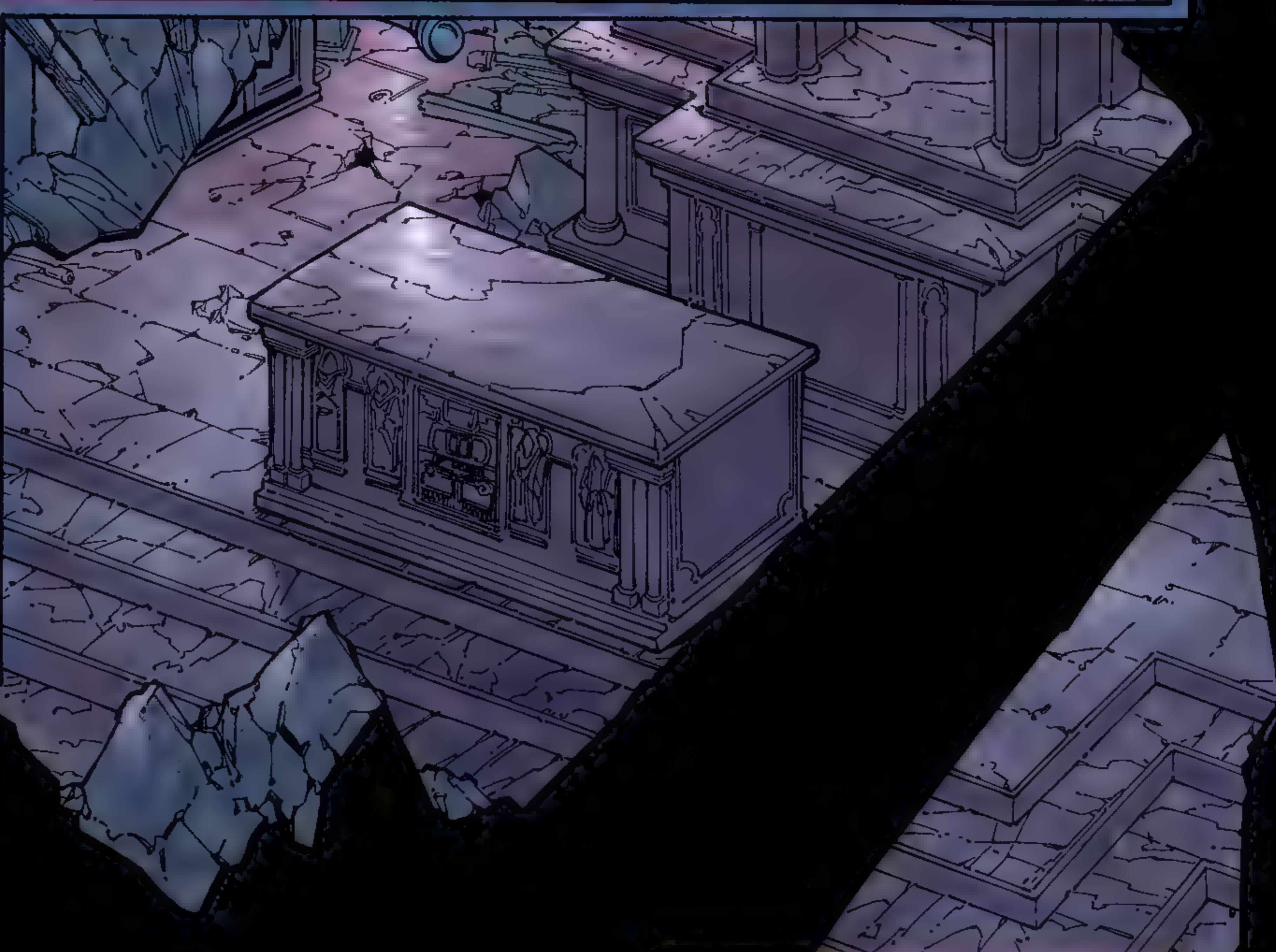
NO ONE IS
HERE.



BUT SOMEONE
HAS BEEN HERE
RECENTLY...



...SOMEONE WHO
DID NOT RESPECT
THE SANCTITY OF
THIS PLACE.



FOR THOUGH THE CHURCH HAS LONG
FALLEN INTO DISUSE, IT REMAINS
HALLOWED GROUND...

...AND AS SUCH, IT WAS THE
PERFECT HOME FOR THE
IMMORTAL BEING KNOWN
ONLY AS...



EKIMUS??!!

BUT EKIMUS
IS NOT IN HIS
SANCTUM...

...RATHER, HE HAS BRAVED THE
UNDERWORLD IN SEARCH OF
THE KEY TO THE ERADICATION
OF THE POWERS OF EVIL.

FERRIED TO THE SHORE OF TARTARUS, AN ISLE
OF ETERNAL IMPRISONMENT, BY THE LEGENDARY
BOATMAN, CHARON, EKIMUS NOW SEEKS THE
COUNCIL OF AN OLD ENEMY FROM THE DAWN
OF EXISTENCE.

IT IS A RISK AT BEST. IT IS THE
ONLY WAY FOR EKIMUS TO END
THE REIGN OF LISSETH, THE
QUEEN OF DARKNESS...



...AND, NOT INCIDENTALLY, ONCE
EKIMUS'S LOVER--IN THOSE
DAYS BEFORE HUMANITY CAME
TO THE WORLD.

IF IT IS TRUE THAT LISSETH IS
THE MOTHER OF ALL EVIL ON
THE EARTH, EKIMUS KNOWS
THAT HE IS THE FATHER...

...AND EKIMUS KNOWS IT IS
FINALLY TIME TO ACCEPT THE
RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS
WAYWARD OFFSPRING...

...IT IS TIME TO
END HIS TAINTED
BLOOD-LINE.

PERHAPS
HE HAS BEEN
IMPRISONED
HERE, EVEN AS
WE WERE
SO LONG
AGO...?

SO, THE
BANISHED
SON CRAWLS
BACK--?!

NO... NOT OUR
FRIEND ESKIMUS! HE IS
HERE FOR NOSTALGIA,
PERHAPS, TO VISIT THE
WORLD OF HIS
BIRTH...?

UNLIKELY,
BROTHERS...
I BELIEVE THE
GRIGORI IS HERE
TO GAZE UPON
OUR BRILLIANCE,
AND THAT
ALONE.

WHICH
OF US IS
CORRECT,
ESKIMUS?

NONE,
SAPHA. I SEEK
ONLY ONE THING--
AN ANSWER.

HOW COULD
WE KNOW ANY
ANSWER?

WHY SHOULD
WE CONCERN
OURSELVES
WITH YOUR
MYSTERIES?!

INDEED.

I MADE AN ETERNAL ERROR BACK
THEN WHEN I ALLIED MYSELF
WITH LISSETH... NOW I SEEK
TO END HER SOULLESS
DYNASTY.

PERHAPS YOU
SHOULD SEEK OUT LUCIFER
FOR YOUR ANSWER--IT WAS YOU
WHO FOUGHT AS HIS MOST
LOYAL GENERAL, WAS
IT NOT?

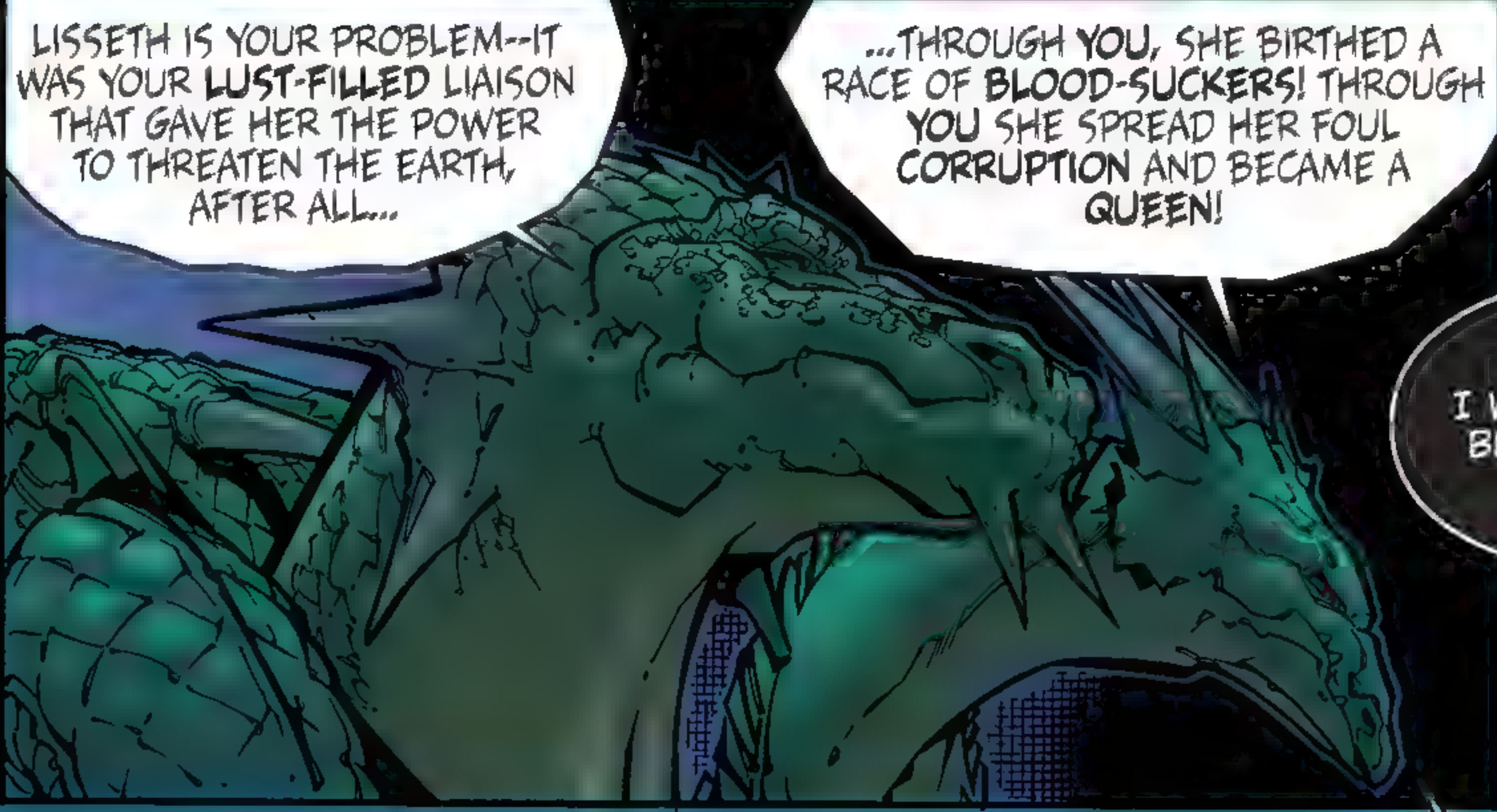
IT WAS YOU,
SAPHA, WHO BOUND
HER FURY THEN--I
NEED TO KNOW
HOW.



THAT WILL
NEVER BE
SPOKEN OF

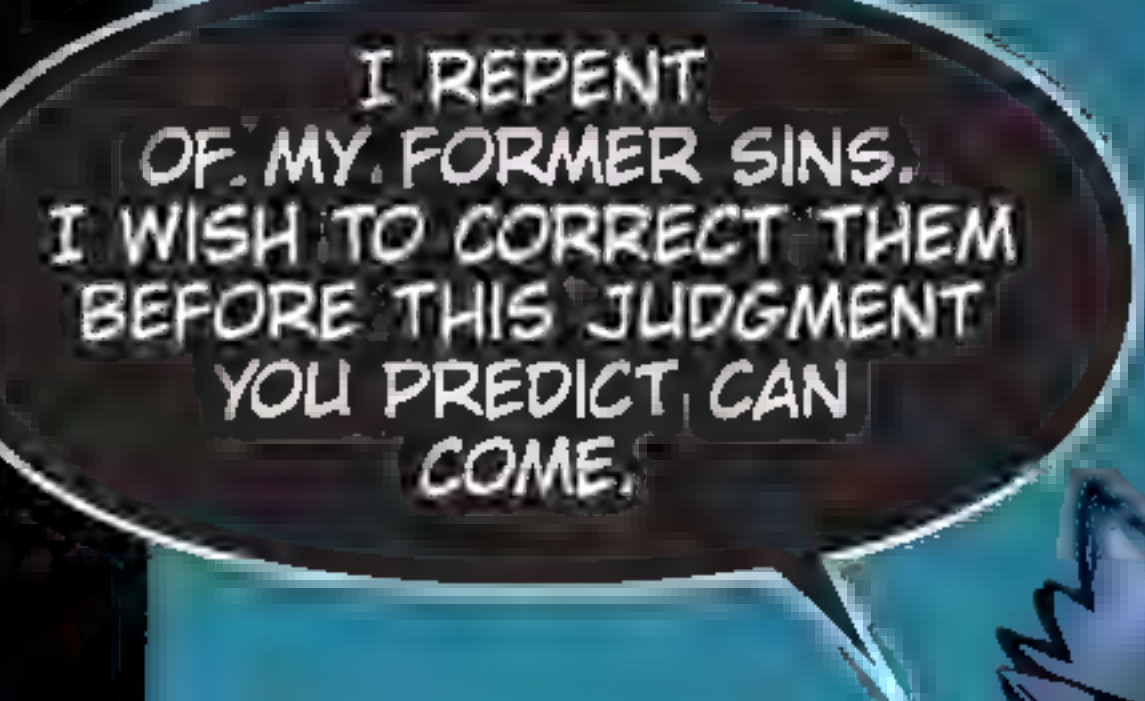
SHE WAS
BANISHED. WE
WERE IMPRISONED.
THAT IS ALL YOU
NEED TO
KNOW.

WE ARE
LONG OUT OF
THE CONFLICT,
GRIGORI.

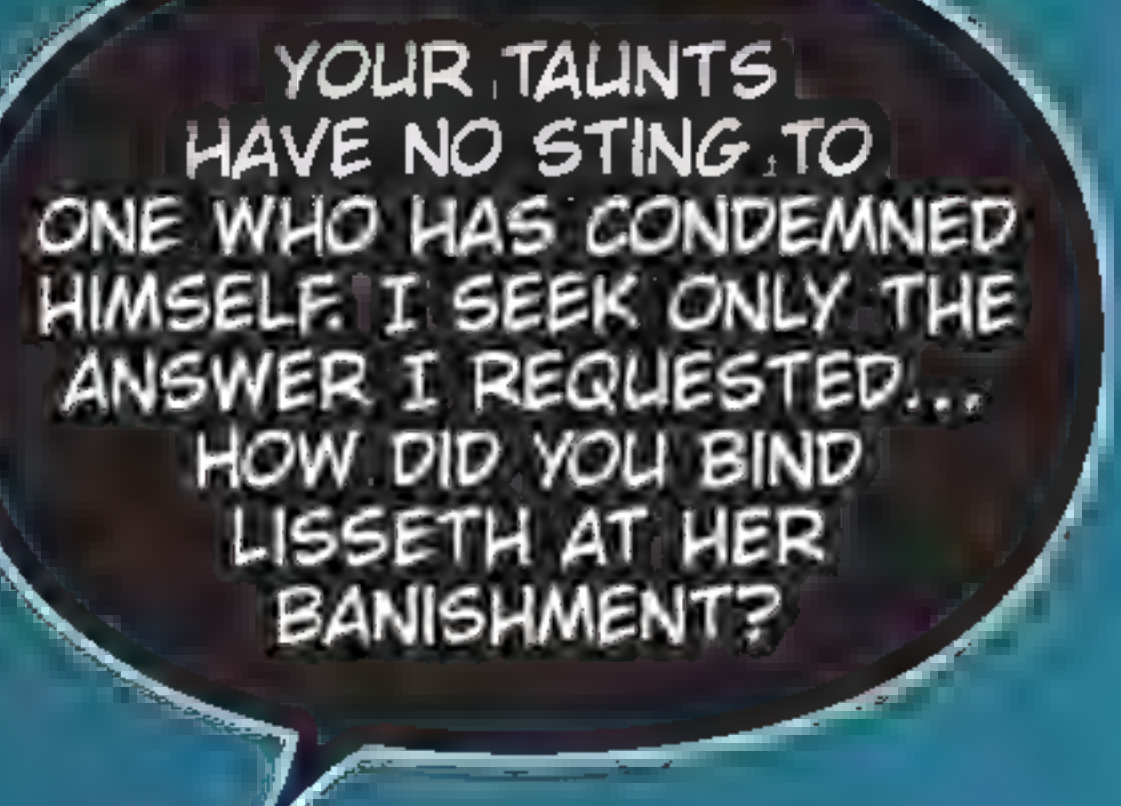


LISSETH IS YOUR PROBLEM--IT
WAS YOUR LUST-FILLED LIAISON
THAT GAVE HER THE POWER
TO THREATEN THE EARTH,
AFTER ALL...

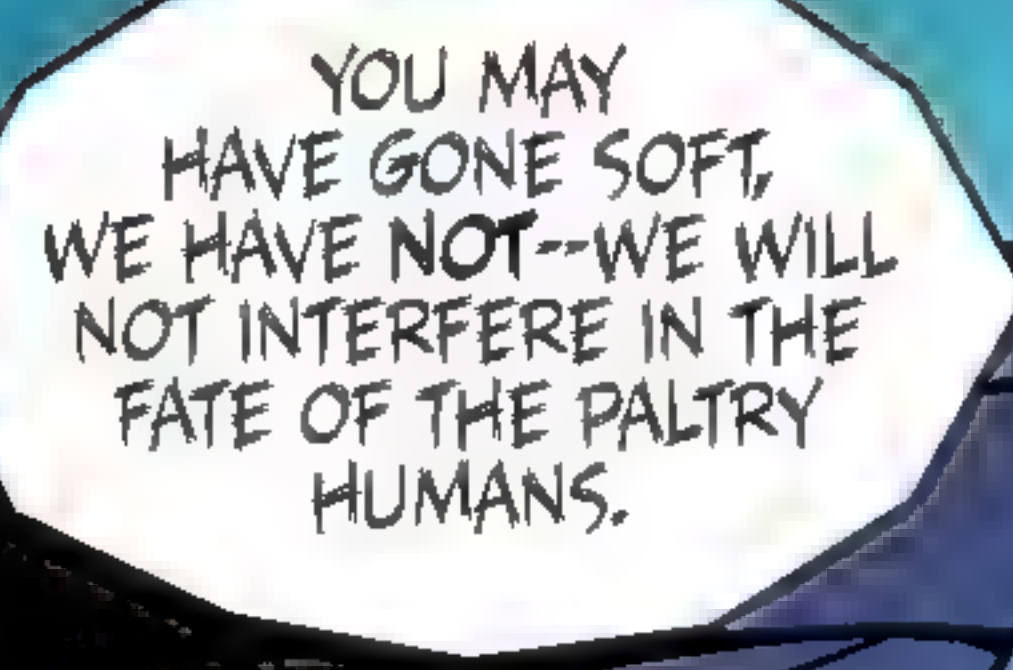
...THROUGH YOU, SHE BIRTHED A
RACE OF BLOOD-SUCKERS! THROUGH
YOU SHE SPREAD HER FOUL
CORRUPTION AND BECAME A
QUEEN!



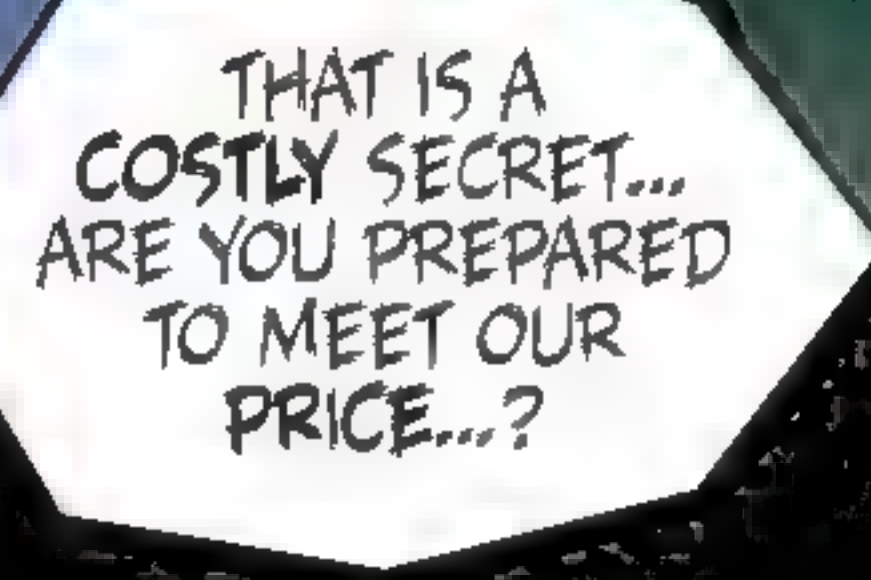
I REPENT
OF MY FORMER SINS.
I WISH TO CORRECT THEM
BEFORE THIS JUDGMENT
YOU PREDICT CAN
COME.



YOUR TAUNTS
HAVE NO STING TO
ONE WHO HAS CONDEMNED
HIMSELF. I SEEK ONLY THE
ANSWER I REQUESTED...
HOW DID YOU BIND
LISSETH AT HER
BANISHMENT?



YOU MAY
HAVE GONE SOFT,
WE HAVE NOT--WE WILL
NOT INTERFERE IN THE
FATE OF THE PALTRY
HUMANS.

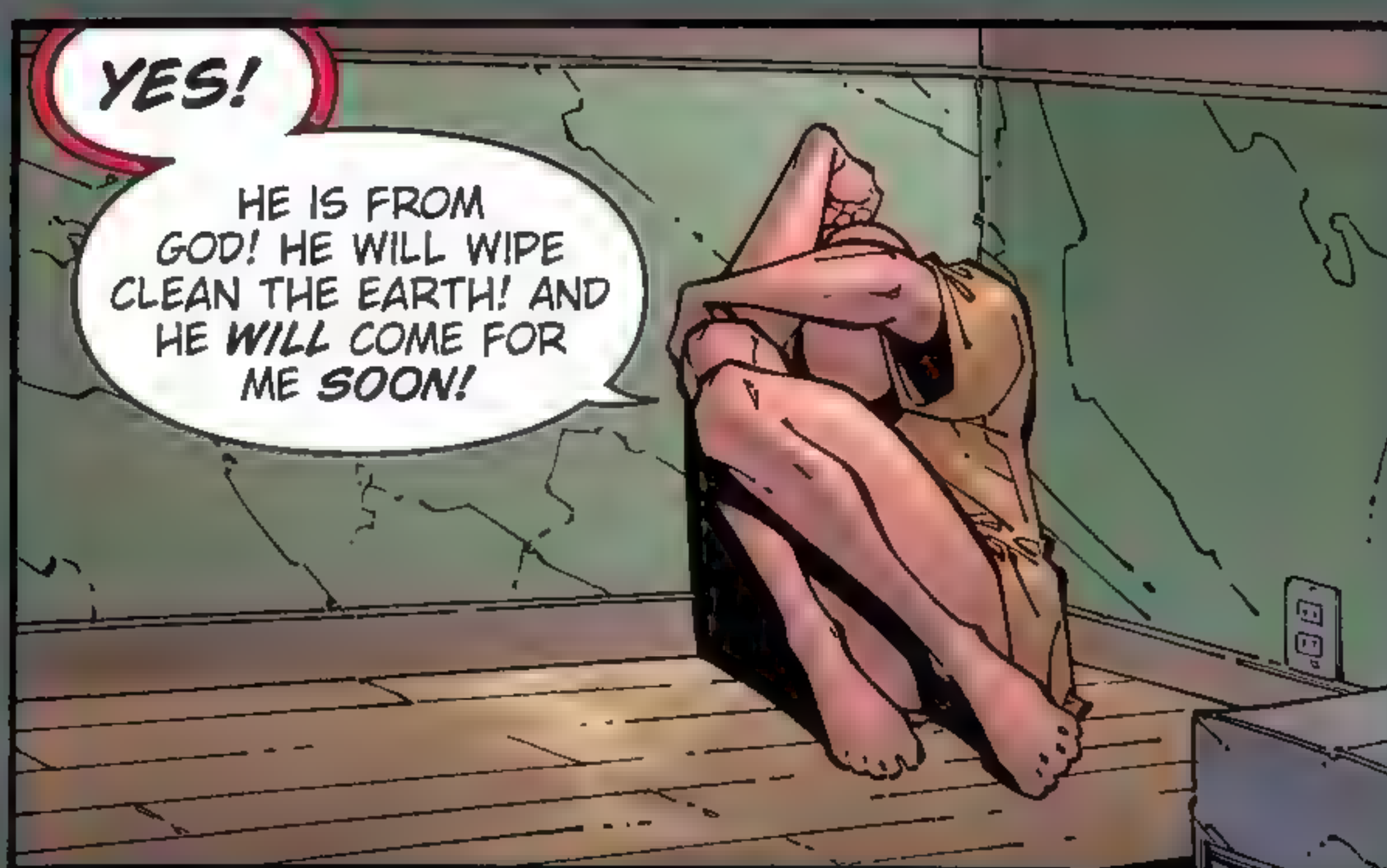


THAT IS A
COSTLY SECRET...
ARE YOU PREPARED
TO MEET OUR
PRICE...?



WHAT DID *TAN* DO TO ZOPHIE, JOE? WHY IS HIS HOLD ON HER ONLY **STRONGER** EVEN THOUGH WE'VE **RESCUED** HER FROM HIM?

GUY HAD POWERS, ALEX-- **CELESTIAL** POWERS MAYBE! THERE'S MORE GOIN' ON HERE THAN WE CAN SEE!



YES!

HE IS FROM GOD! HE WILL WIPE CLEAN THE EARTH! AND HE **WILL** COME FOR ME **SOON!**



RELEASE ME TO MY BELOVED AND PERHAPS HE WILL SPARE YOU!!



YOU TWO ARE OF THE **DARK**--YOU CANNOT STAND AGAINST THE MASTER! HE CAN **DESTROY** YOU!



TO GET TO US, HE MAY HAVE TO TAKE **YOU** OUT TOO-- IS HE PREPARED TO DO THAT?

OF COURSE NOT--HE **LOVES** ME! AND HE'LL LOVE YOU TOO--IF YOU IF YOU **REPENT!**

Hot and cold, this Chiquita.



IT MIGHT BE THAT THE MASTER WOULD GIVE US TO EACH OTHER, ALEX...WE COULD BE **TOGETHER** FOREVER!

YOU WANT THAT DON'T YOU, ALEX?!

YOU'RE... YOU'RE UNDER A **SPELL** OF SOME SORT, ZOPHIE...DON'T MAKE **PROMISES** YOU CAN'T WILLINGLY KEEP.

TAN AND HIS **MESSIAH** ARE **FAKES**--WHY CAN'T YOU WAKE UP TO THAT?!

I AM AWAKE! TAN HOLDS ME UNDER NO **SPELL** SAVE HIS UNENDING **LOVE**--AND THAT I WILLINGLY EMBRACE!

LIKE **ME**, MY MASTER IS A FALLEN ANGEL, WHO ACTS TO REDEEM HIMSELF AND THIS WORLD! THROUGH HIM, THE CREATOR IS TRANSFORMING US **ALL**!

YOU ARE A **HERETIC**, ALEX--KEEPING ME FROM HIS **LOVE** IS A **SIN**! I **SHUN** YOU!

GOT AN **IDEA**, BOBO...

...THEY'VE GOT A **CONNECTION**, SHE AND TAN. HE CAN FIND HER...

...AND I'M BETTING **SHE** CAN FIND **HIM**... RIGHT, ANGEL?



SO...YOU HAVE FALLEN IN LOVE
WITH THE CHILDREN OF GOD,
EH, GRIGORI?

PERHAPS...
FROM AFAR. BUT WHY
THIS BITTER BARB FROM
ONE WHO ONCE SERVED AT
THE CREATOR'S RIGHT
HAND? HOW DID YOU
FALL FROM FAVOR,
DRAGON?



THE LORD WORKS
IN MYSTERIOUS
WAYS, FOOL!!

EXACTLY--
PERHAPS EVEN
THROUGH AN OLD
BEAST LIKE ME...



NONETHELESS, I REPEAT.
HOW DID YOU BIND
LISSETH?

PERHAPS
THERE ARE OTHER
DRAGONS WHO MIGHT
KNOW...?



DRAGONS
ARE ALL ONE--
BUT NONE SHARE
OUR SECRET!



DRAGONS ARE ONE?
WHAT NONSENSE IS
THIS?! YOU DON'T
KNOW **ANYTHING**,
SAPHA!

CAN YOU RISK
THAT? WE DID SAY
THERE WAS A PRICE,
REMEMBER...

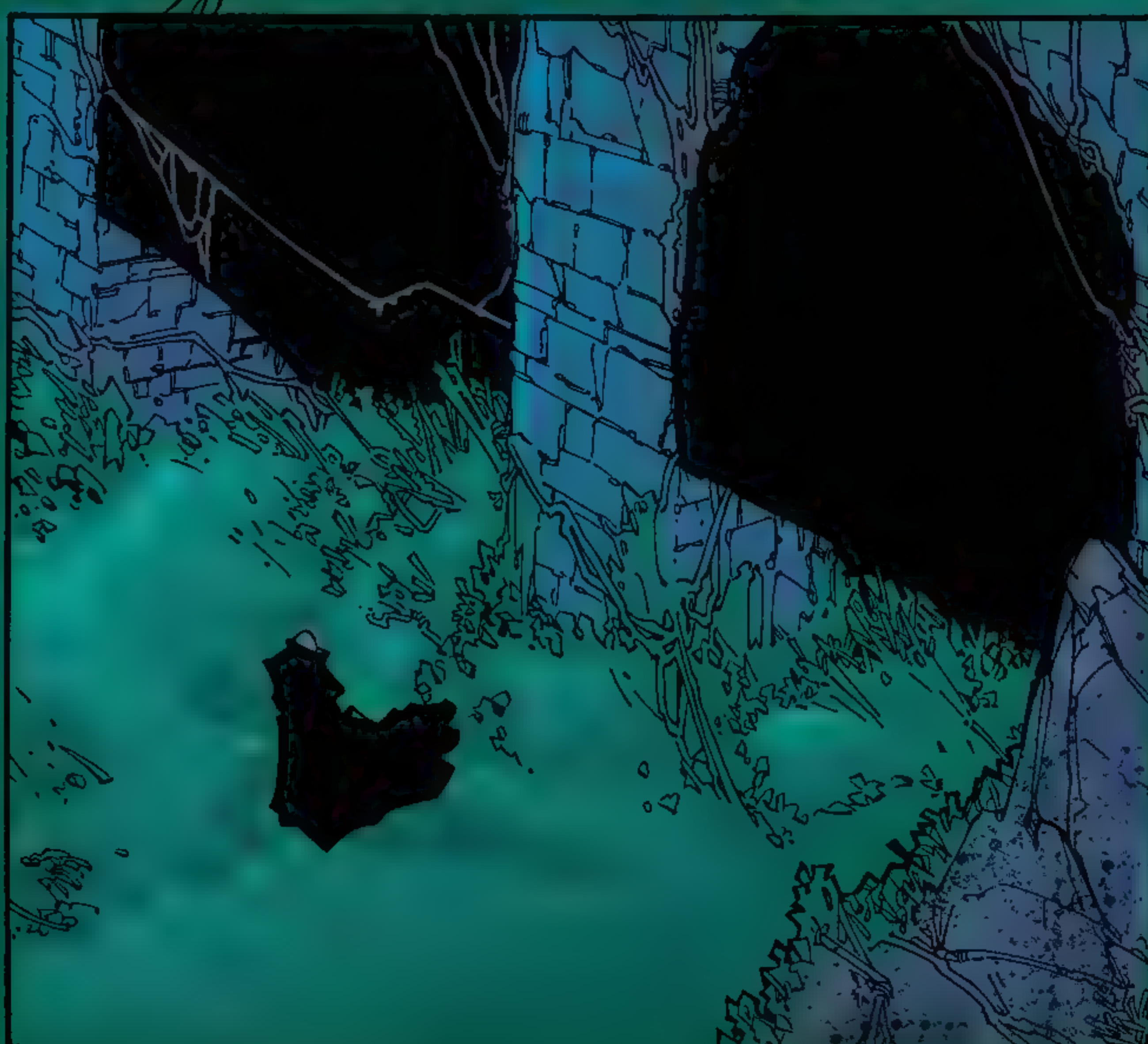
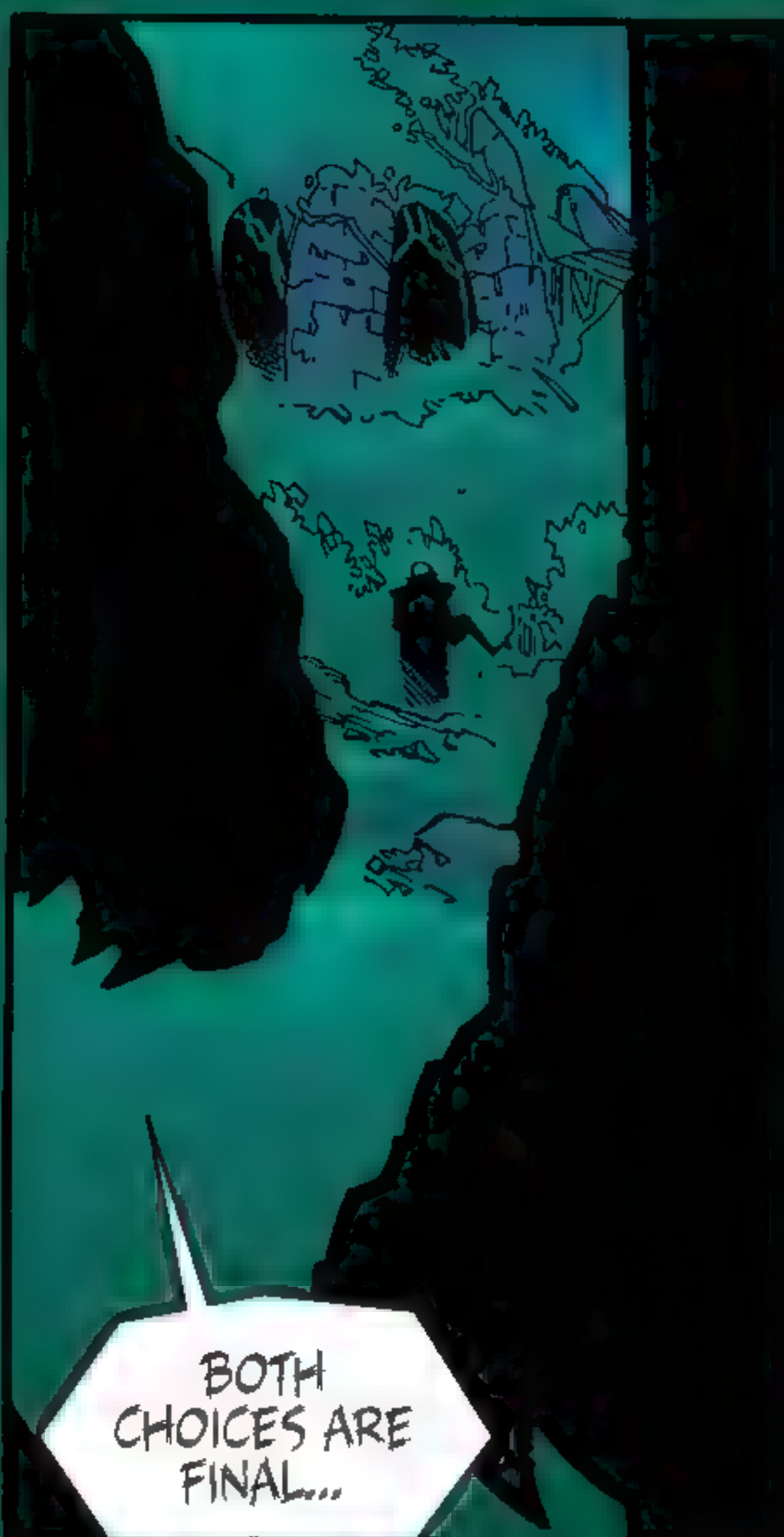
I WILL
PAY ANY
PRICE! TELL
ME!

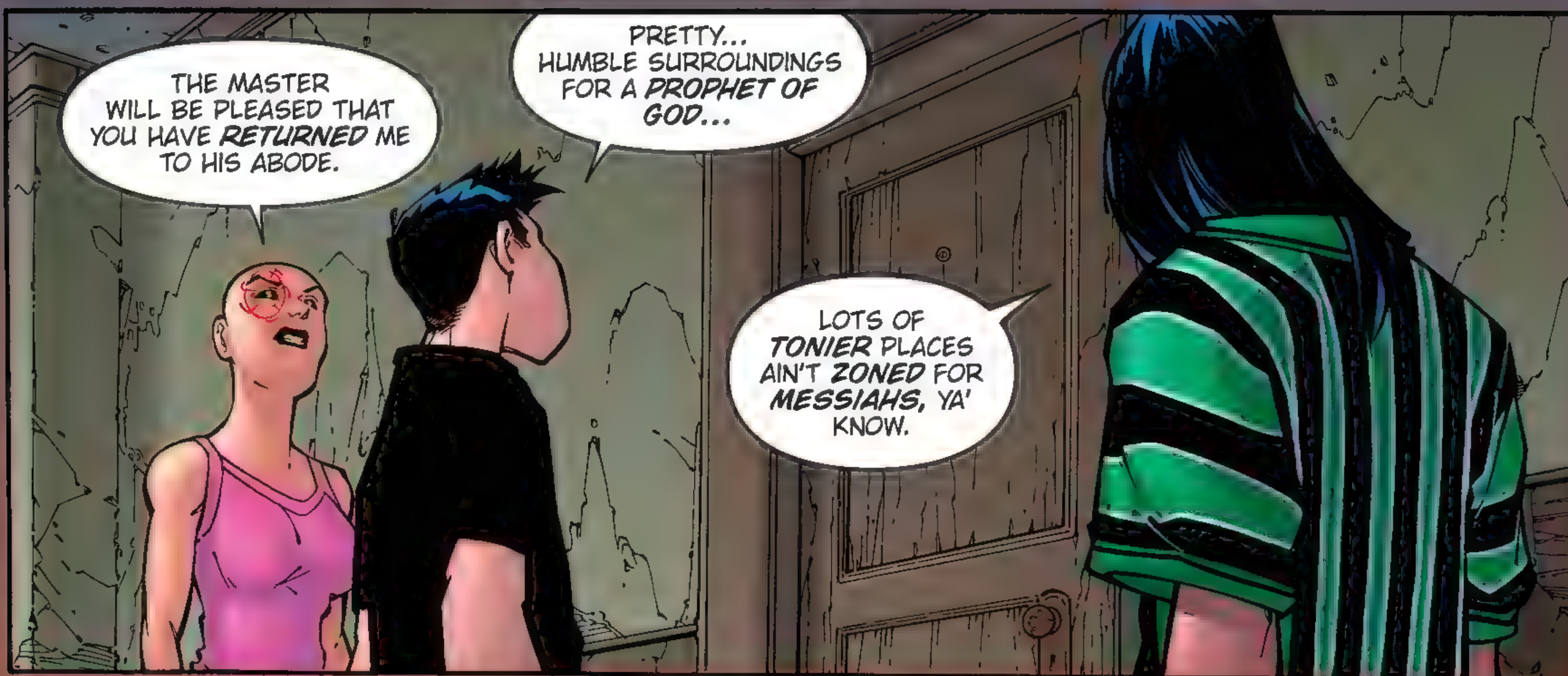


SEE THE CAVES
ABOVE--ONE LEADS
TO THE ANSWER, THE
OTHER DOES NOT--
CHOOSE!

ONE TAKES
YOU TO A SCROLL,
THE OTHER TO THE
GARDEN OF THE
TREE OF LIFE.

FIND THE SCROLL
AND YOU FIND THE ANSWER
TO LISSETH'S DESTRUCTION, BUT
LOSE PARADISE--FIND THE
GARDEN AND YOU CAN CLAIM
ETERNAL PEACE!





THE MASTER
WILL BE PLEASED THAT
YOU HAVE **RETURNED** ME
TO HIS ABODE.

PRETTY...
HUMBLE SURROUNDINGS
FOR A **PROPHET OF
GOD...**

LOTS OF
TONIER PLACES
AIN'T **ZONED** FOR
MESSIAHS, YA'
KNOW.



THIS IS GONNA BE **HARD**,
ALEX--MAKE SURE IF YOU'RE
DOIN' IT FOR HEAD OR
HEART.

IS IT BECAUSE IT'S
RIGHT, OR 'CAUSE YOU
GOT A JONES FOR
ZOPHIE?



I DON'T
KNOW WHAT
YOU'RE TAKING
ABOUT...

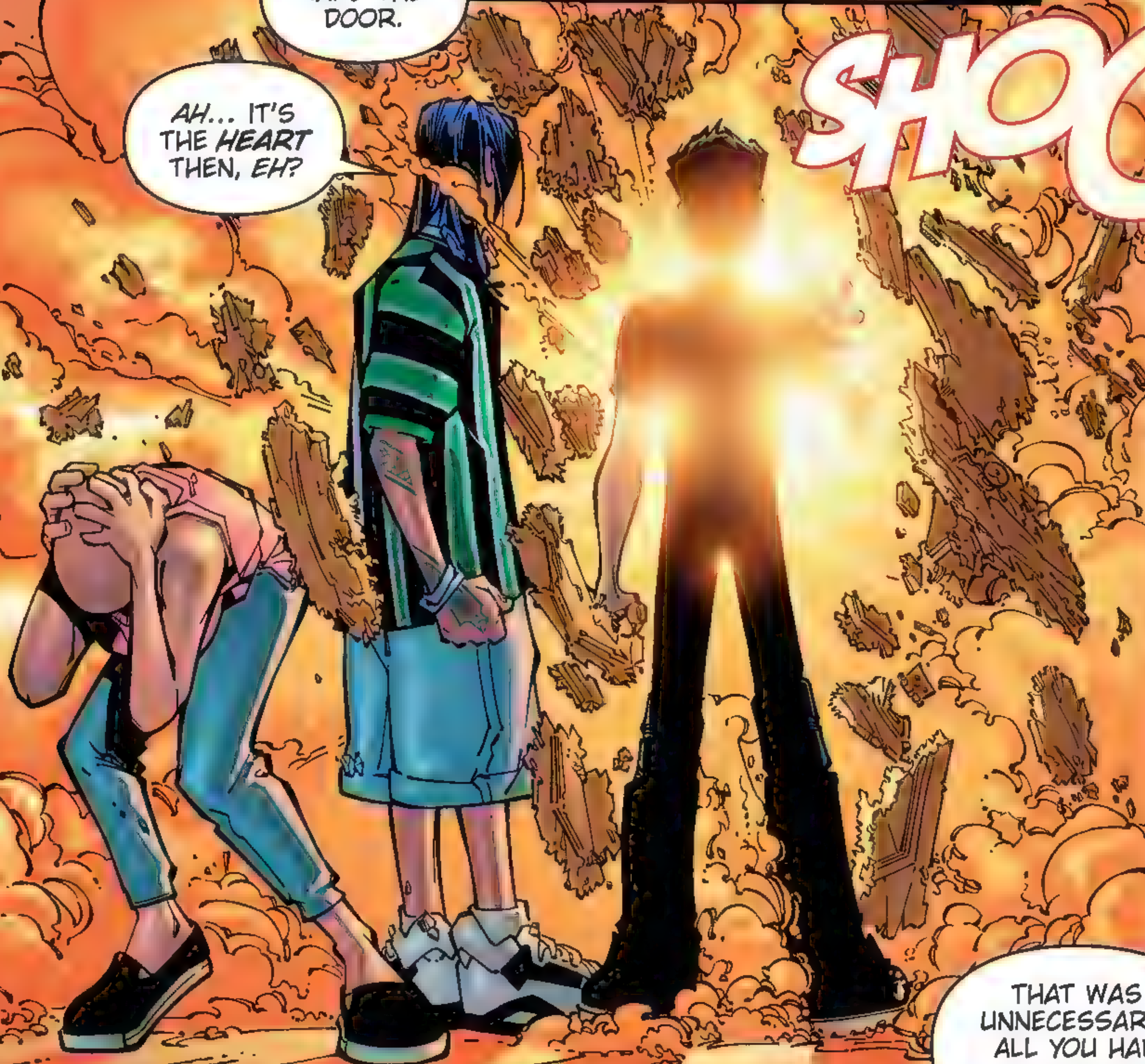
GREAT.
THEN LET ME
PUNCH THE DOOR
FOR YA'...



I'LL
TAKE THE
DOOR.

AH... IT'S
THE **HEART**
THEN, EH?

SHOOBOOM



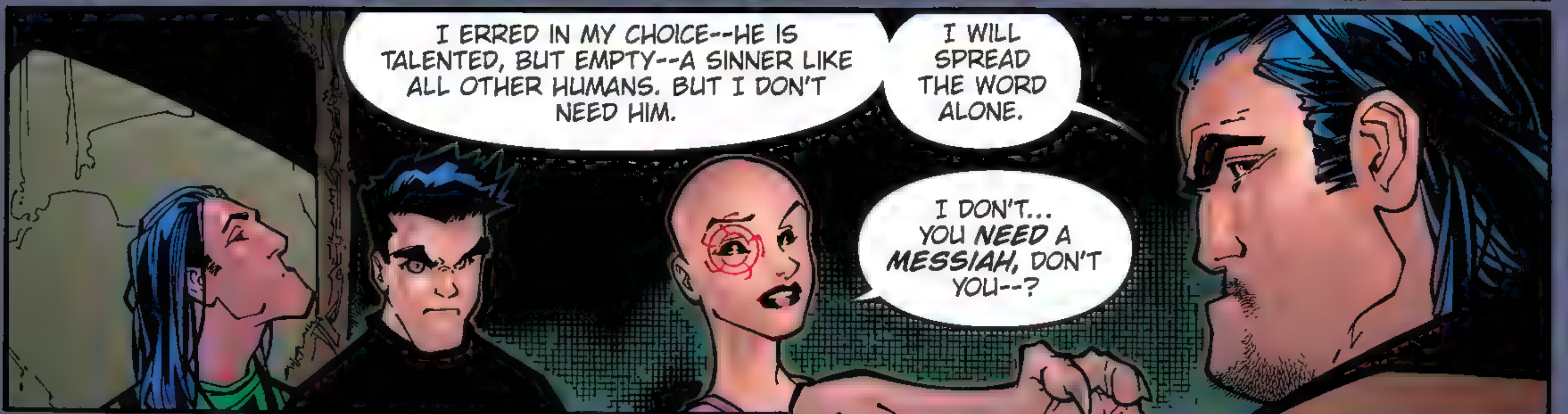
THAT WAS
UNNECESSARY!
ALL YOU HAD
TO DO WAS
KNOCK!





DON'T BE HARSH WITH HIM, ZOPHIE, DEAR--THE YOUNG ONE'S **OVERREACTION** IS JUST AS PREDICTABLE AS HIS ARRIVAL. I'VE BEEN AWAITING THIS CONFRONTATION.

THOUGH I WILL FACE YOU ALONE--MY **MESSIAH** HAS TURNED OUT TO BE A **POSEUR...**



I ERRED IN MY CHOICE--HE IS TALENTED, BUT EMPTY--A SINNER LIKE ALL OTHER HUMANS. BUT I DON'T NEED HIM.

I WILL SPREAD THE WORD ALONE.

I DON'T... YOU **NEED** A **MESSIAH**, DON'T YOU--?

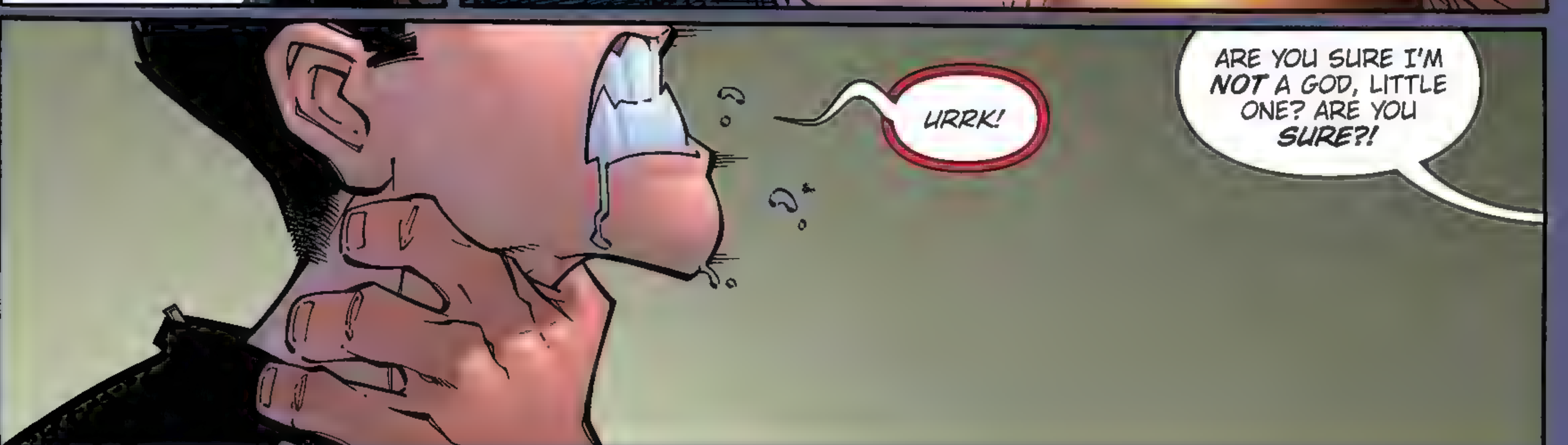


MY POWER GROWS **STRONGER**--AS DOES MY **CALL**. PERHAPS I AM THE **SAVIOR...**

DON'T BLASPHEME... YOU ARE THE **MESSANGER...**



HE'S **NOTHING** BUT A **LUNATIC!**



UHRK!

ARE YOU SURE I'M **NOT** A GOD, LITTLE ONE? ARE YOU **SURE?!**



ALEX--?!

HE NEVER
CAME BACK HERE--
AND EKIMUS
IS GONE AS
WELL...

WHY ARE
WE **HERE**, DUMAS?
WHAT IS THIS TALK
OF **JUDGMENT** AND
END TIMES?



THAT IS THE
QUESTION, ISN'T
IT, **SCARLET**
THINBAULT?



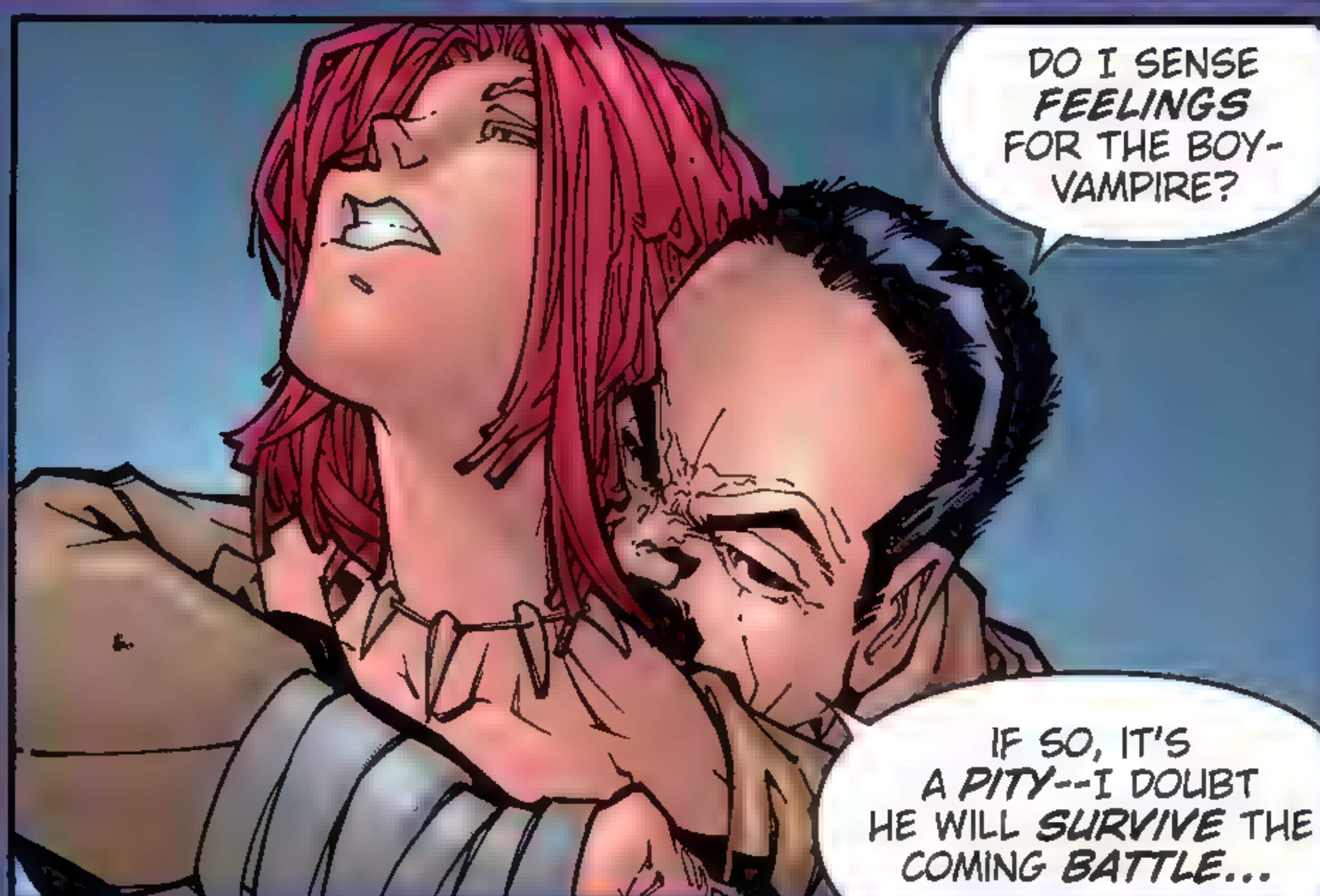
ARE YOU
CERTAIN THAT THIS
PLACE IS **DESERTED**? DO NOT
THE **CHICKIES** ALWAYS RETURN
HOME TO THE **ROOST**?!

HERE
CHICKIE, CHICKIE,
CHICKIE--!



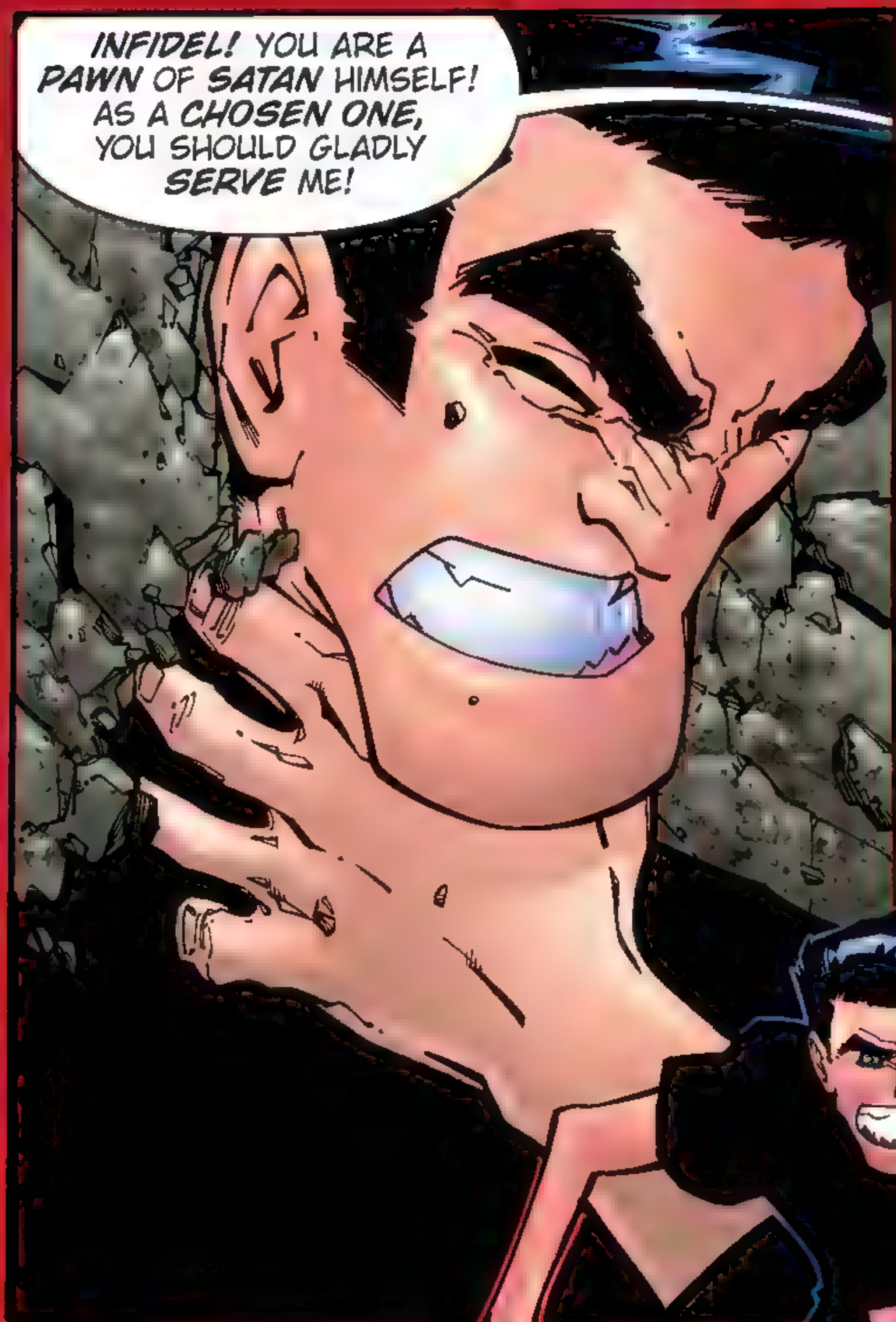
What the hell has happened
to your brain, fool--did
your inner wolf
eat it?

DO YOU
KNOW **ANYTHING**
ABOUT ALEX OR
NOT?!



DO I SENSE
FEELINGS
FOR THE BOY-
VAMPIRE?

IF SO, IT'S
A **PITY**--I DOUBT
HE WILL **SURVIVE** THE
COMING **BATTLE**...



INFIDEL! YOU ARE A
PAWN OF SATAN HIMSELF!
AS A CHOSEN ONE,
YOU SHOULD GLADLY
SERVE ME!



I'LL SERVE
YOU MY
BOOT,
BUTT-WAD!

UNNN--!

WHOMP



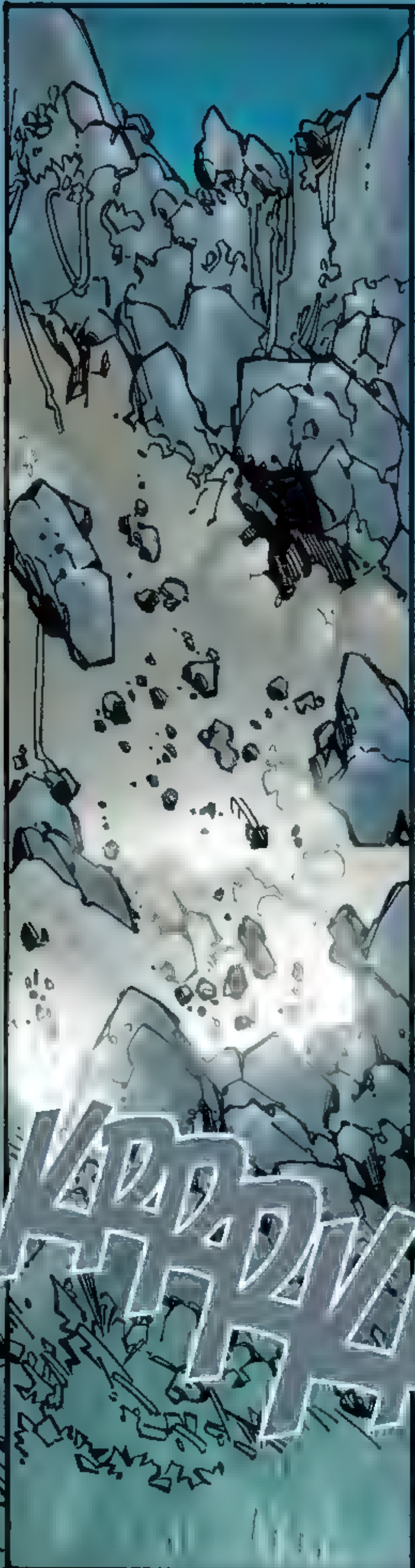
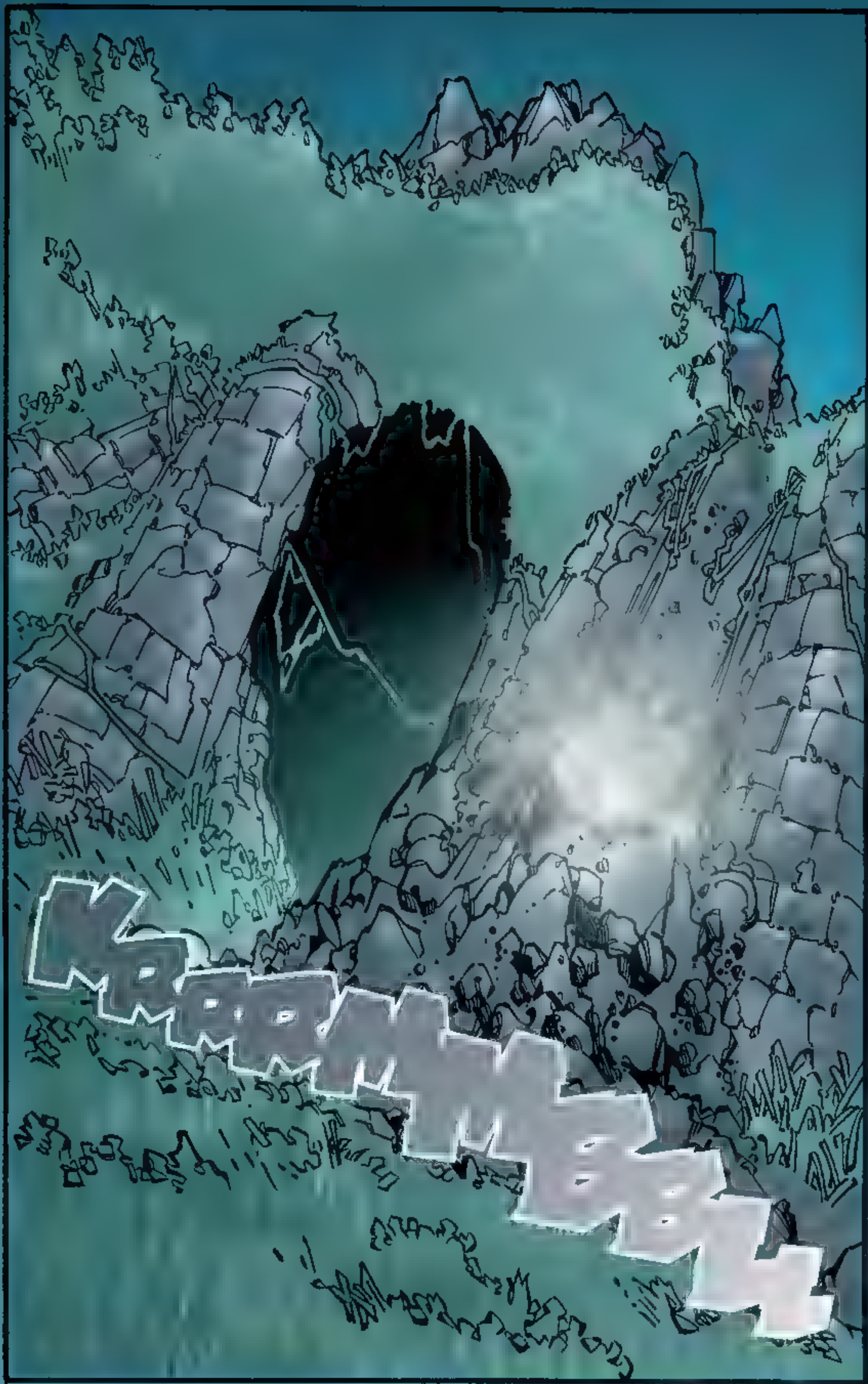
NNOOOO...

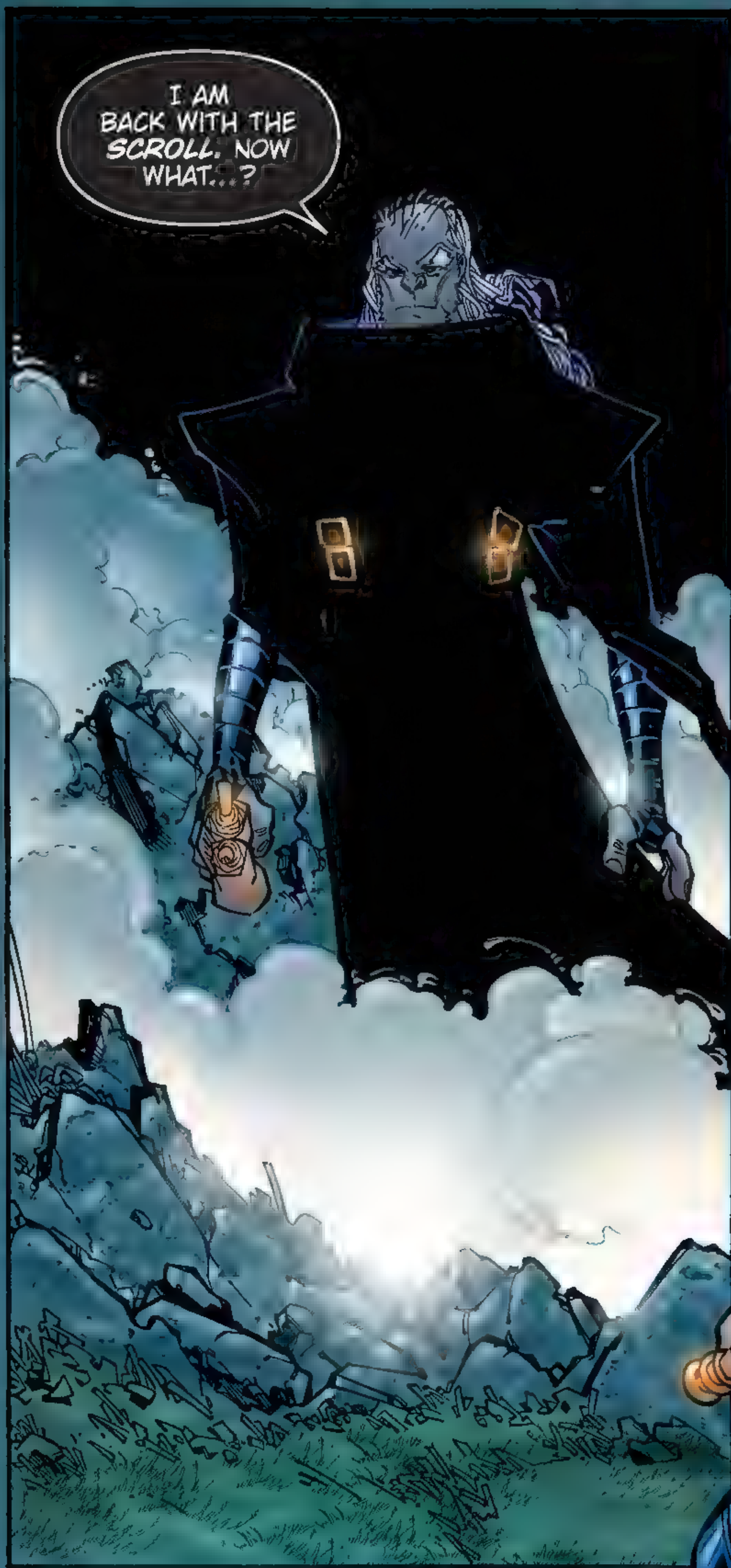


YES-S-S-S-S...

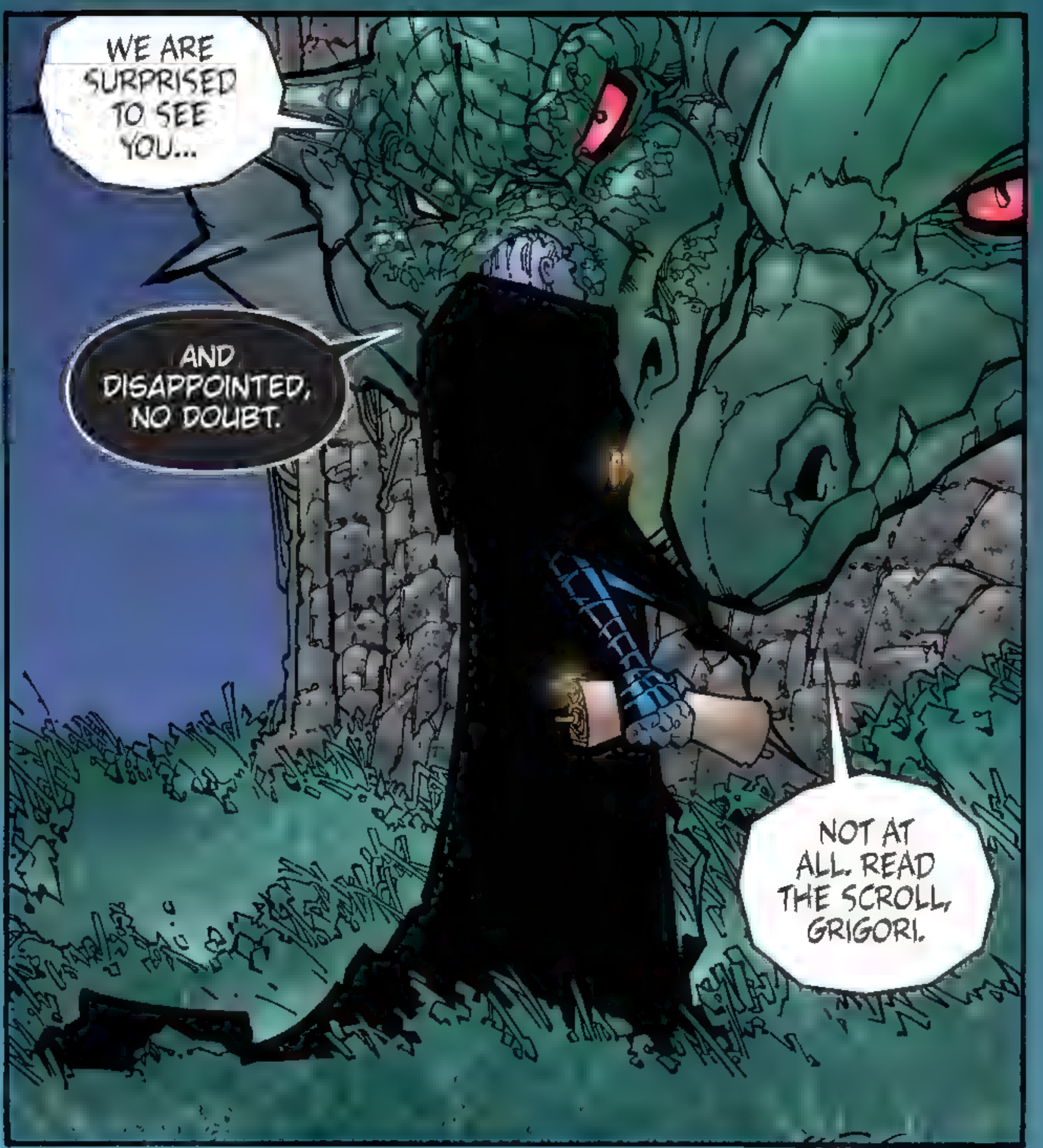
NNNN...







I AM
BACK WITH THE
SCROLL. NOW
WHAT...?



WE ARE
SURPRISED
TO SEE
YOU...

AND
DISAPPOINTED,
NO DOUBT.

NOT AT
ALL. READ
THE SCROLL,
GRIGORI.



CHEGWAH
MOLIK BENAWEK
LOLPROK DAGON
REGRA MALAPRAN
FROGRATH DEPNU
GRISZAGGAH
NESPERD PRENAT
DIO HOGANNAK
FWIR!



THOSE WORDS--!
THE INCANTATION OF
LIBERATION AT
LAST!

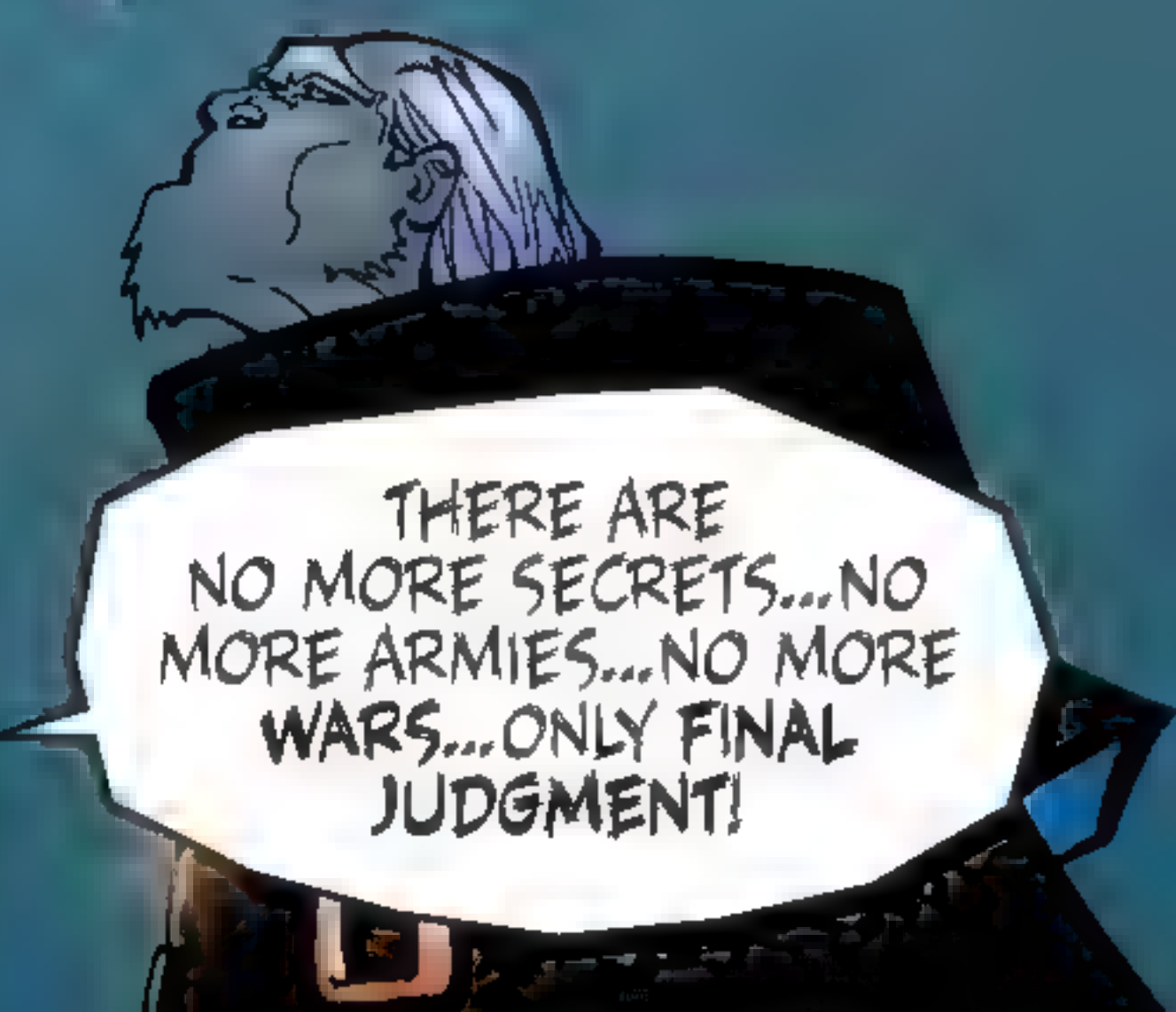
OUR PRISON
VAPORIZES! WE
ARE FREE!



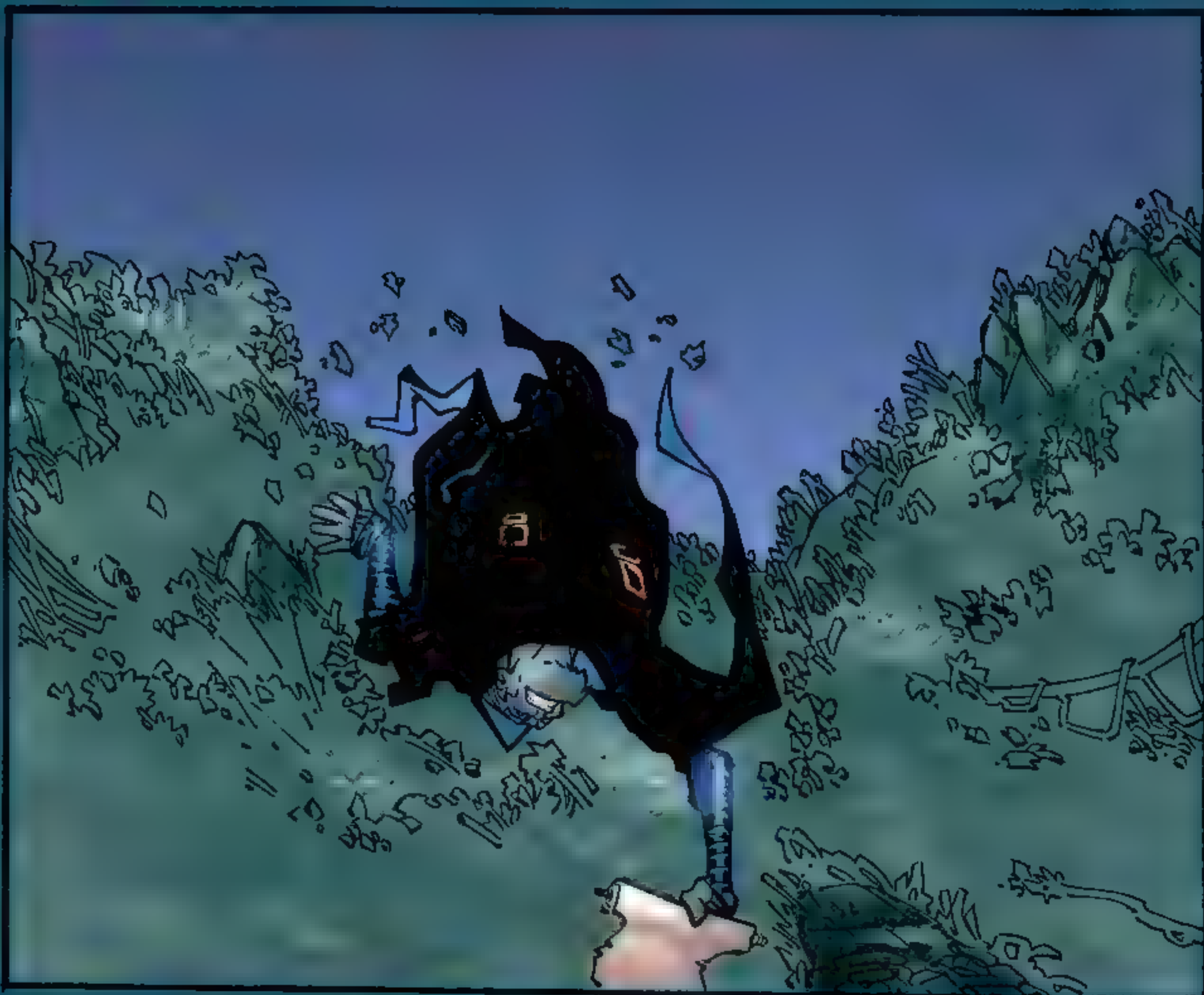
THANK YOU, GRIGORI.
YOU SHALL HAVE WHAT
YOU WISH: AN END TO
CONFLICT!

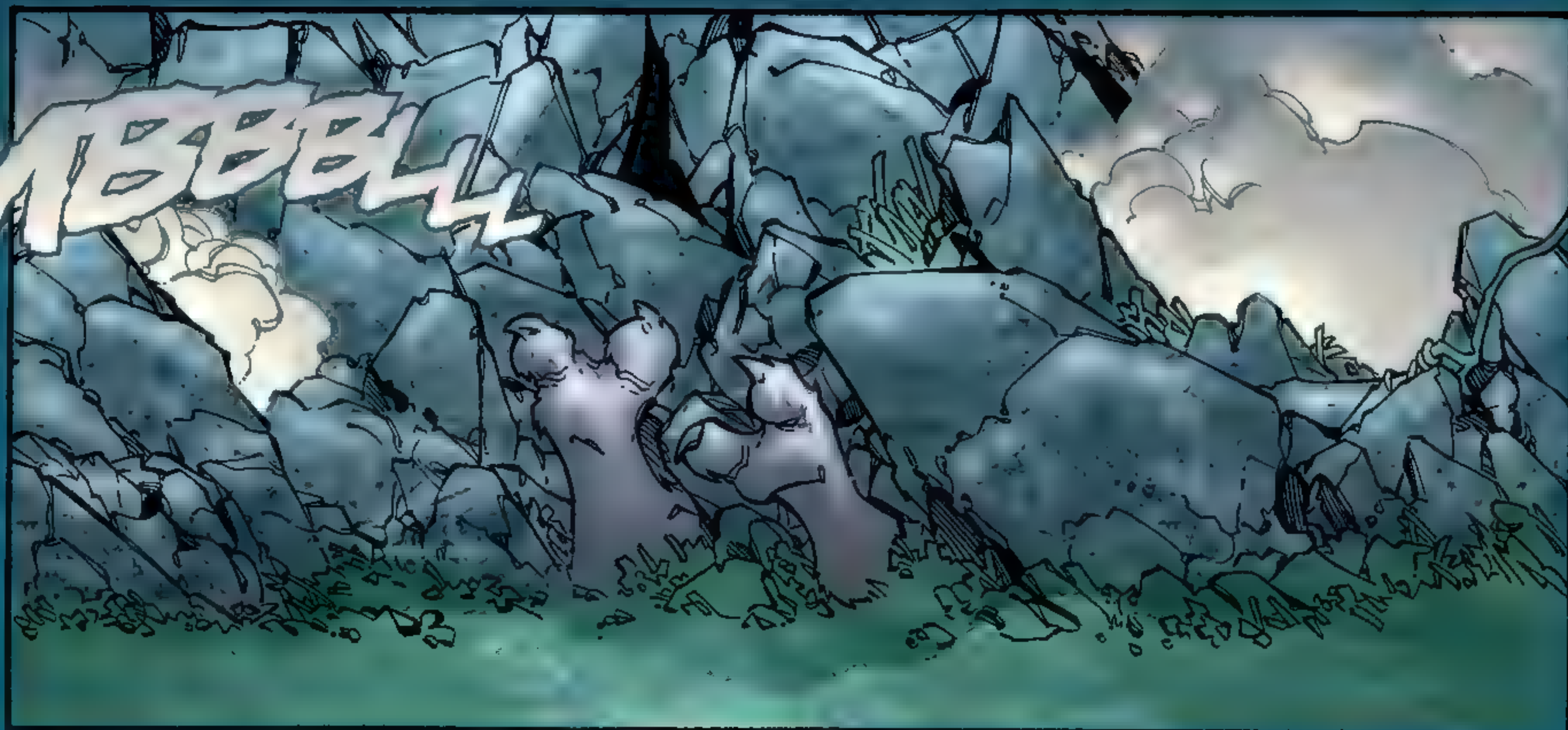
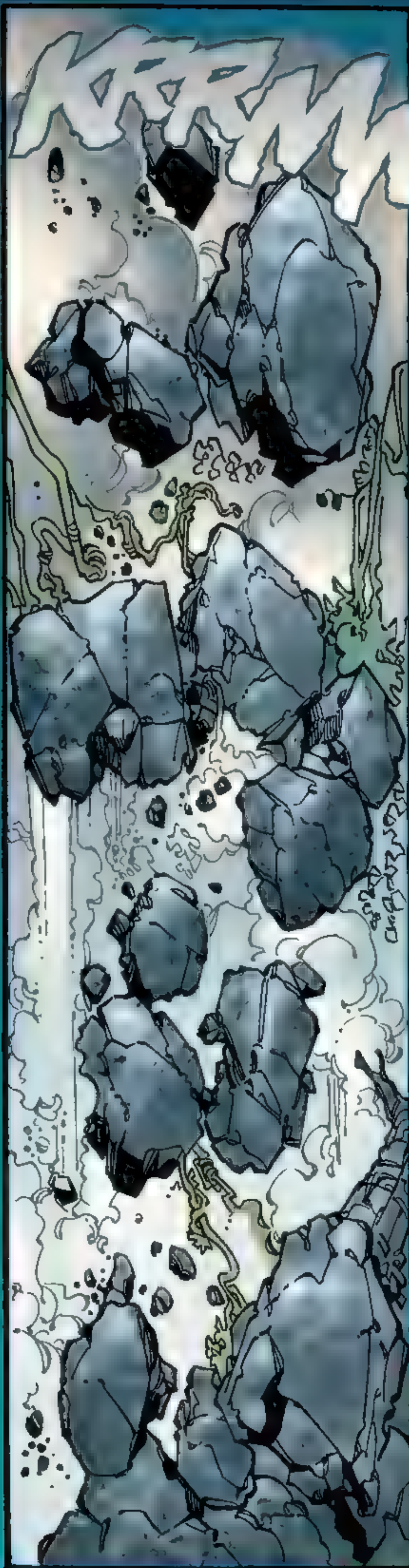


TELL ME THE
SECRET--
NOW!



THERE ARE
NO MORE SECRETS...NO
MORE ARMIES...NO MORE
WARS...ONLY FINAL
JUDGMENT!



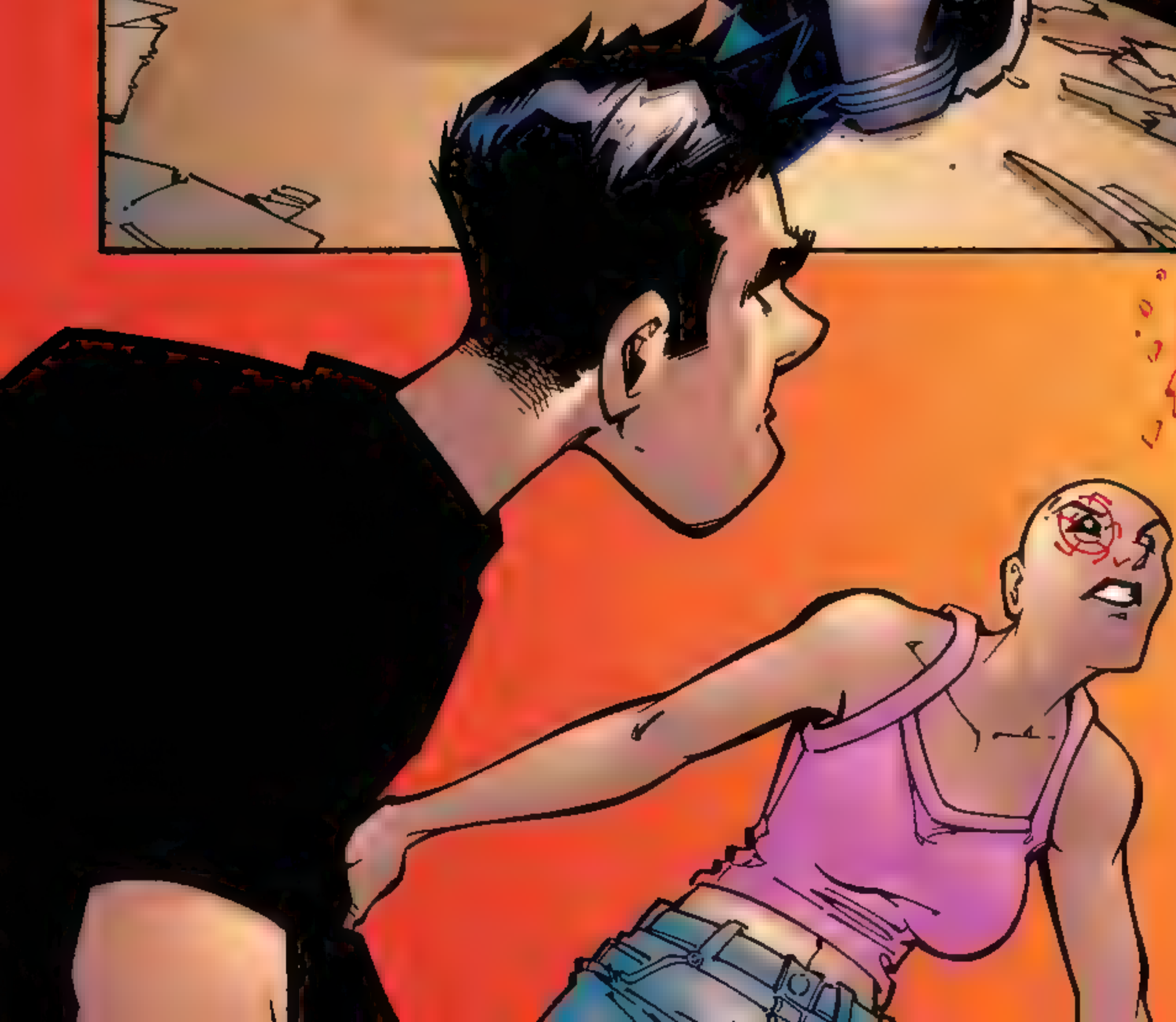
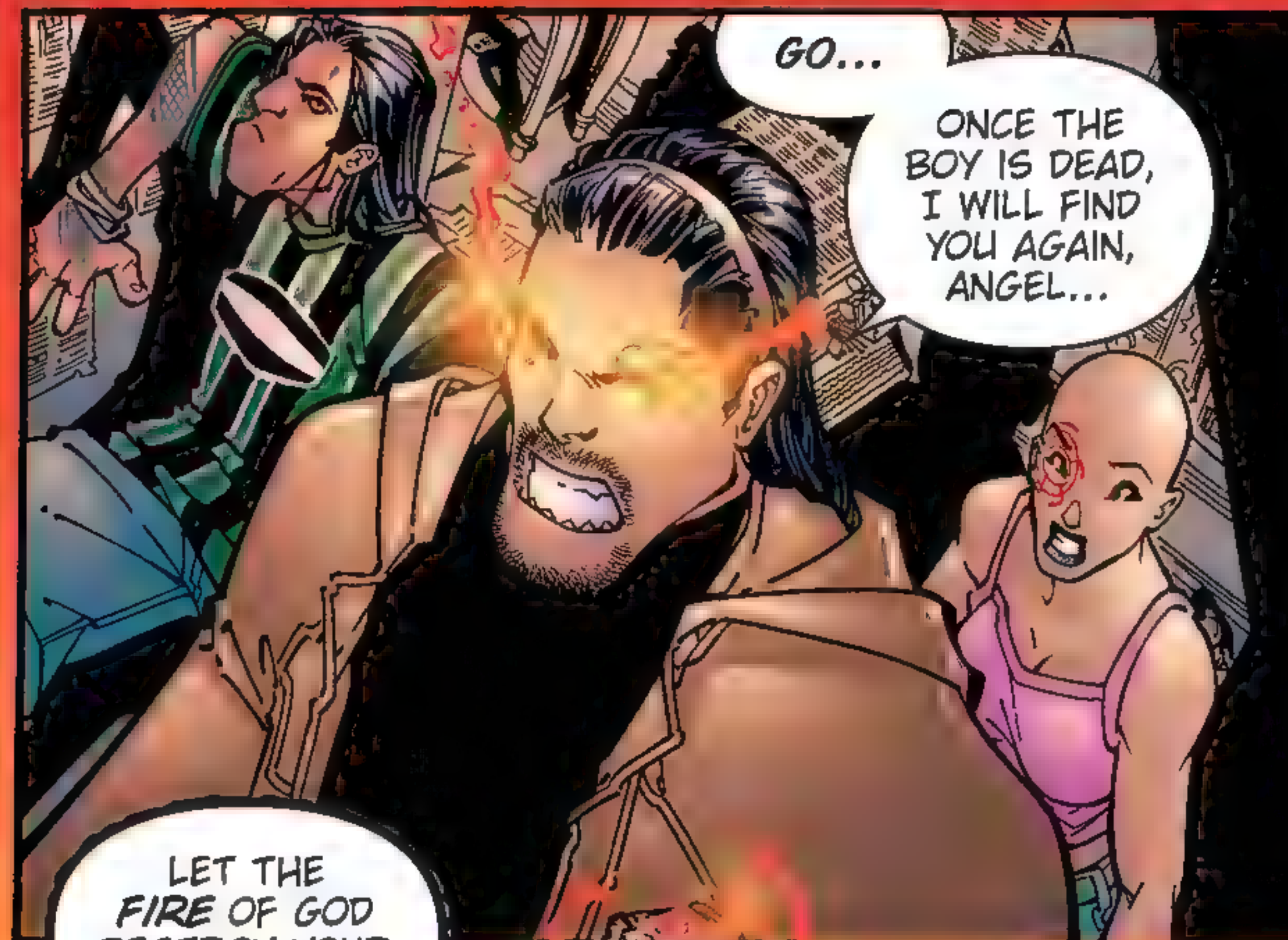


THOUGH
IT COST US
GREATLY, THE
BOOK IS FINALLY
CLOSED ON THIS
ONE.

GOOD RIDDANCE...
NOW LET US
CONTACT THE
BROTHERHOOD...

THE WAR IS OVER.
LET JUDGMENT
COMMENCE.







I AM AT
THE LORD'S WORK.
I MUST SPREAD THE WORD
AND CLEANSE THE PEOPLE
BEFORE THE *FINAL*
TRUMPET!

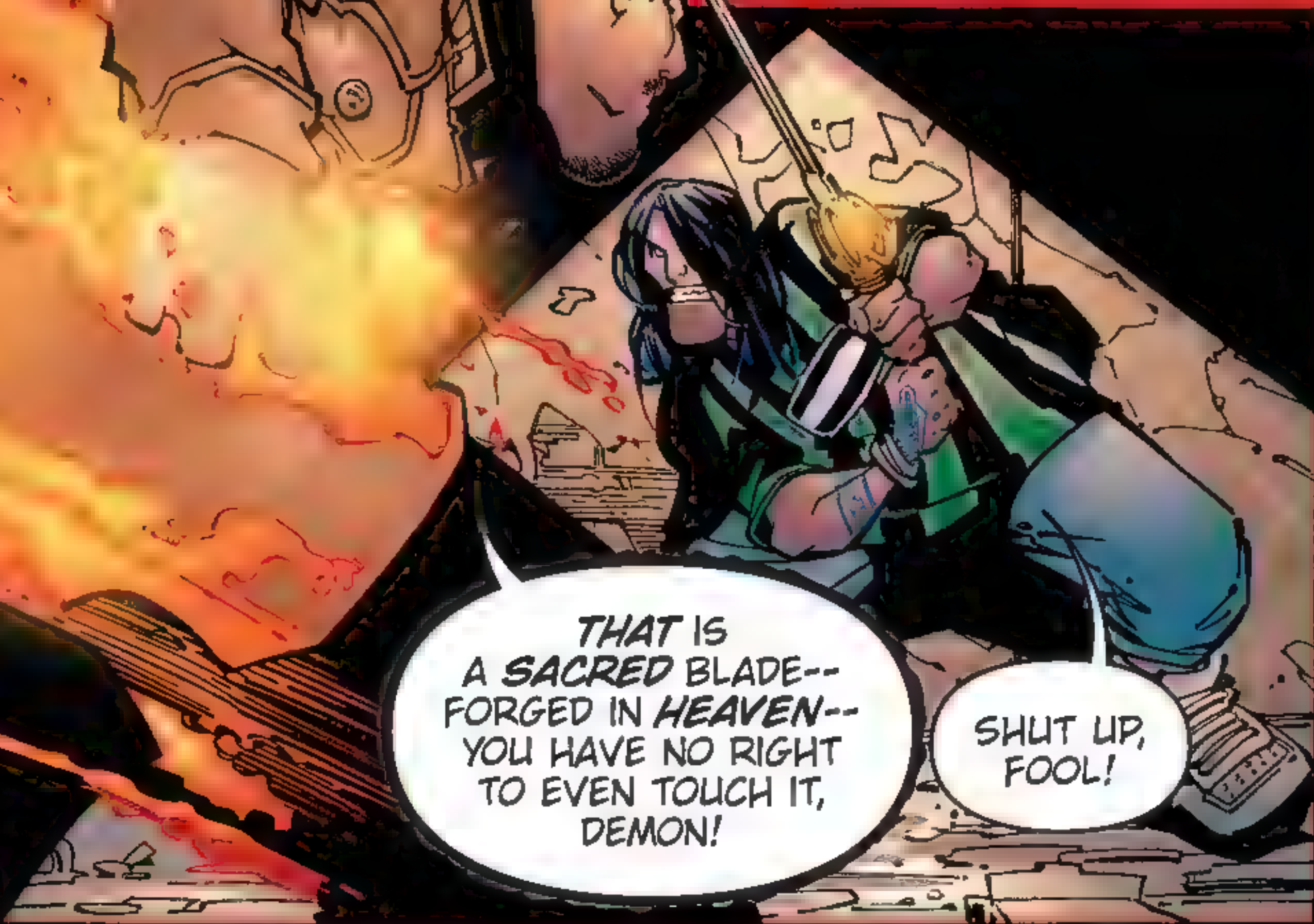
SSHHHH

AAIEEE!

YOU LIE!
IT'S THE *DEVIL*
WHO LEADS YOU!!
BUT THIS *ANGEL*
SWORD WILL
STOP YOU!!



THRAASH



THAT IS
A *SACRED* BLADE--
FORGED IN *HEAVEN*--
YOU HAVE NO RIGHT
TO EVEN TOUCH IT,
DEMON!

SHUT UP,
FOOL!



GIVE
IT TO
ME!

OH,
YEAH...!

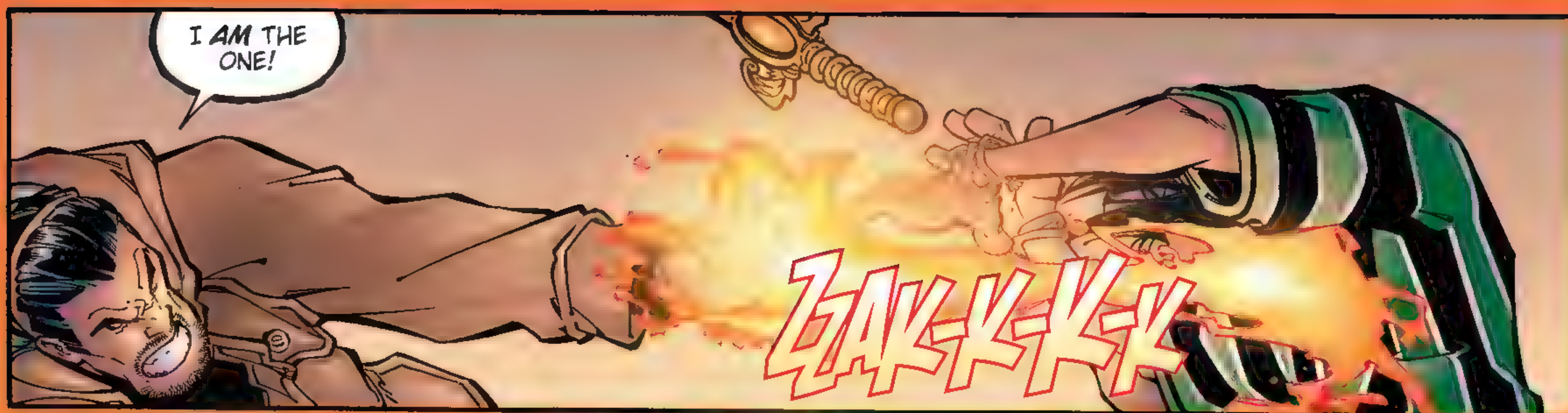


SHRIIP



ST-STAY
BACK...

I-I DON'T
UNDERSTAND.
I THOUGHT
HE WAS THE
ONE...







MY...GOD...
THE **DRAGONS**...
THEN THE END
HAS FINALLY
COME!

WHAT
DOES IT
MEAN?!

IT MEANS
WE'RE ALL
SCREWED.





CHAPTER NINETEEN

BURNT OFFERINGS

A large green dragon with red eyes and sharp teeth is breathing fire in a city street. The dragon is the central focus, with its head and front legs visible. It is breathing a massive stream of fire that fills the lower half of the frame. In the background, there are city buildings, some of which are on fire. A car is overturned on the right side. In the foreground, a man in a purple shirt is running towards the left, looking back in terror. A woman in a blue shirt is running towards the right, holding a baby. The scene is chaotic and filled with destruction.

IT IS THE STUFF
OF NIGHTMARES.
PARTICULARLY
TWISTED
NIGHTMARES...

...FLAMES BLAZE
TOWARD HEAVEN,
AS THE DRAGONS
SPREAD HELLISH
DESTRUCTION.

ROAAAH!

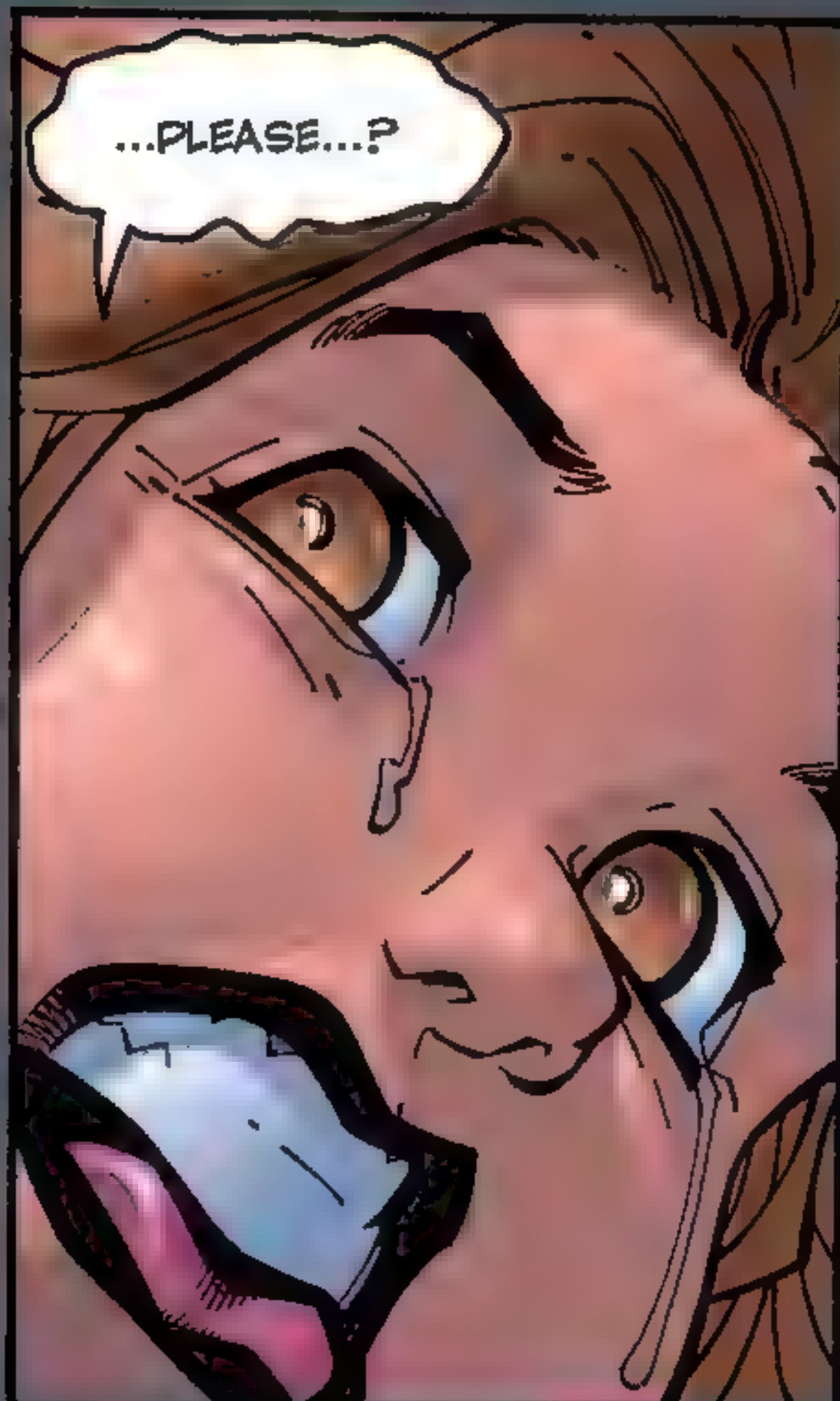
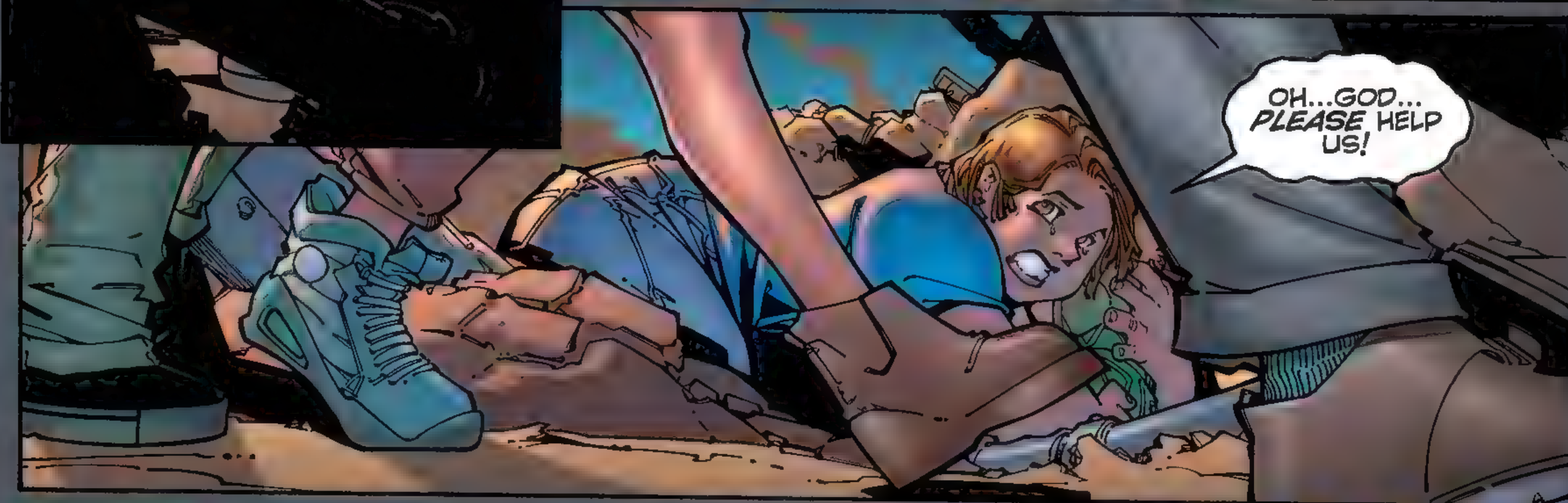
KRAASH!

DON'T
WORRY, BABY--WE'LL
FIND YOUR DADDY
AND EVERYTHING'LL
BE OKAY...

IT MIGHT BE BELFAST, OR
BEIRUT, BUT IT ISN'T. IT IS
MIDTOWN MANHATTAN, AND
THE CITIZEN'S OF THIS
GREAT CITY ARE LEARNING
A NEW BRAND OF TERROR...

...THE TERROR OF
FINAL JUDGMENT,
AND ETERNAL DOOM.

YAAAAH!





YOU'RE
SAFE HERE,
M'LADY...

WHA'...??!



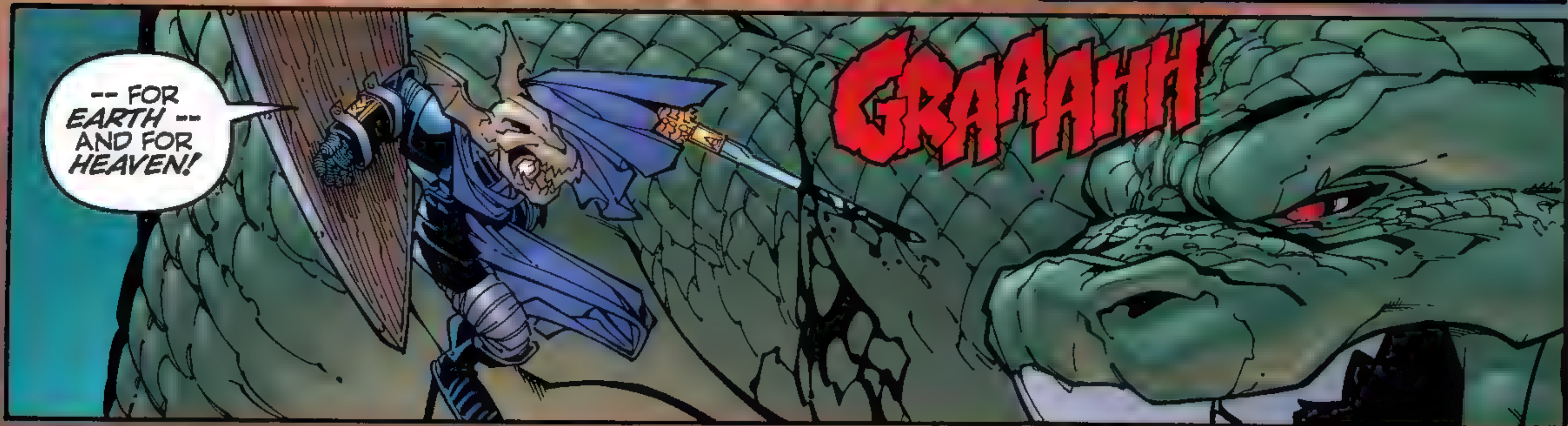
THE
MYSTIC SHIELD OF
SAINT GEORGE WILL
STAY THIS DEMON'S
HELLISH BREATH...



...WHILE MY
BLESSED SWORD
WILL EXTINGUISH
IT FOREVER!



I KNOW NOT WHY THESE
BEASTS PLAGUE THE WORLD
AGAIN -- BUT I MUST
BATTLE ON --



-- FOR
EARTH --
AND FOR
HEAVEN!

GRAAAHH

OTHER PLACES,
OTHER DRAGONS.

RAAAAHH

GRRR
RRR
RRR

WHOOAH!

SKUUUUNCH

JOE -- GET
ZOPHIE OUT
OF HERE!!

COME WITH
US, ALEX -- HE'LL
TOAST YOU!

I CAN
HANDLE
THIS!

ROAARR

FALLEN ANGELS,
WEREWOLVES, HOLY
ASSASSINS, PHONY
MESSIAHS,
VAMPIRES --

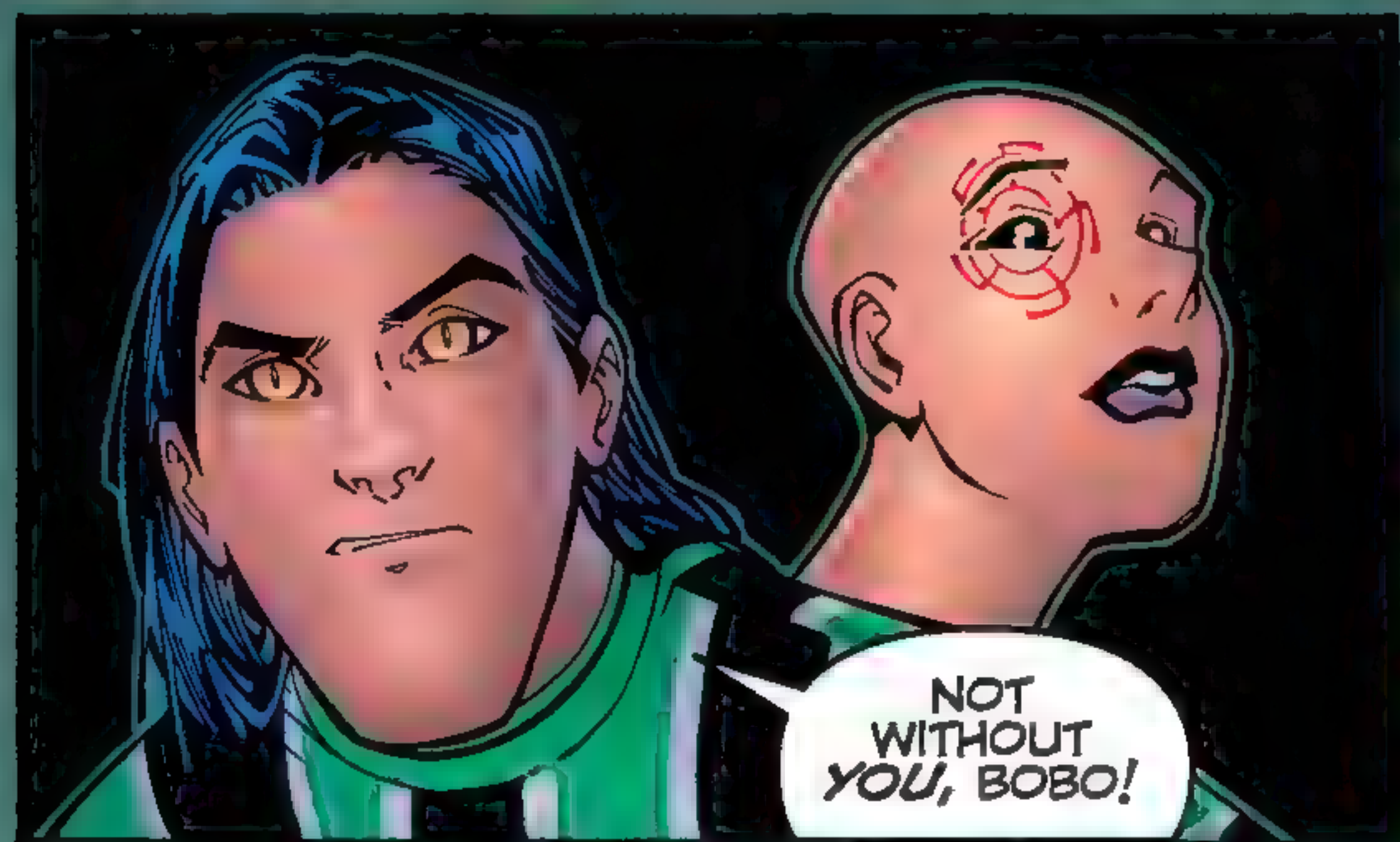
I'VE
SEEN -- AND
SURVIVED --
IT ALL!

SSZZSS

NOTHING
MAKES SENSE
ANYMORE --
BUT IT DOESN'T
SURPRISE
ME!



ALL I'VE
DONE IS PISS
IT OFF, JOE --
GET ZOPHIE
OUT NOW!

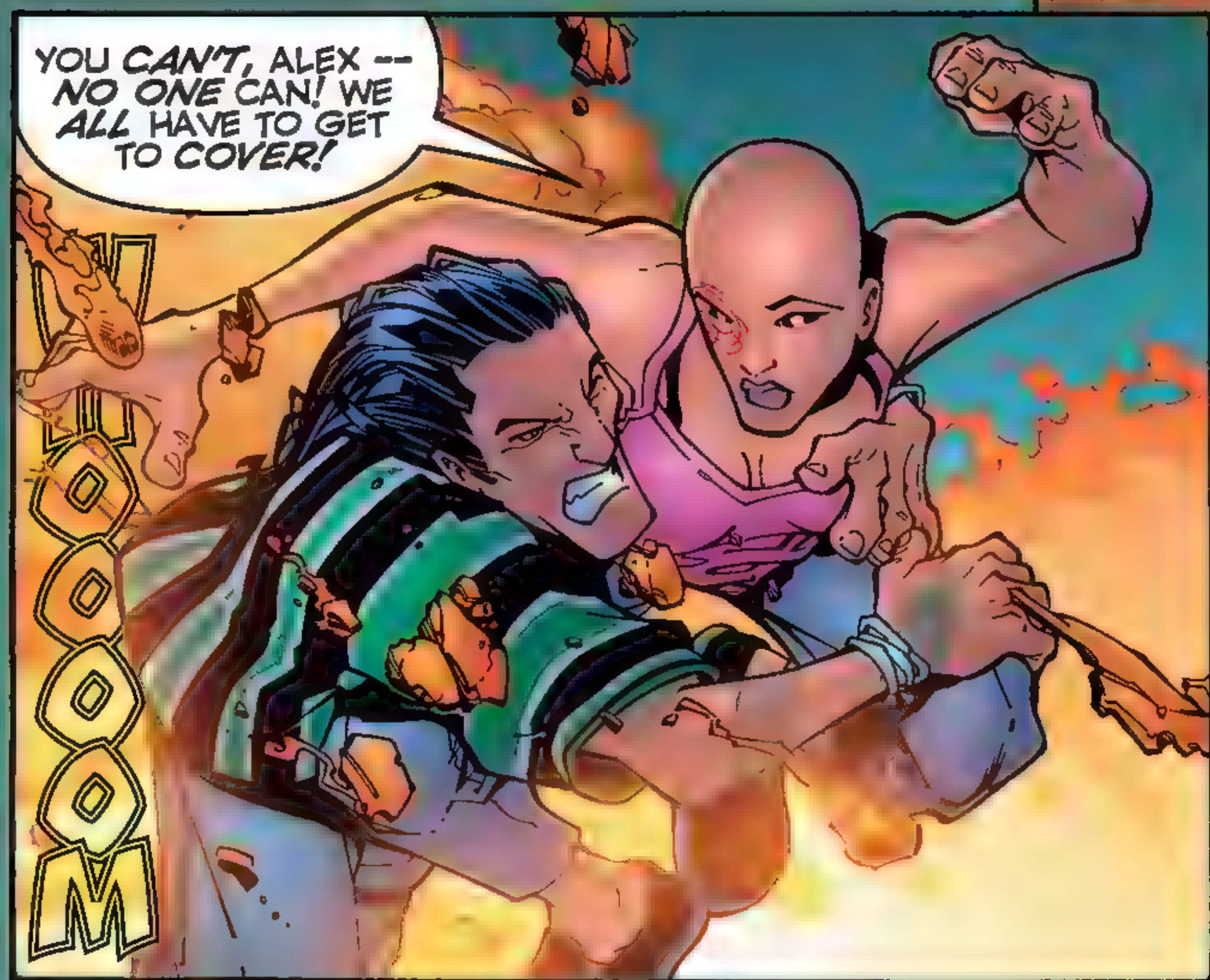


NOT
WITHOUT
YOU, BOBO!



RAHHHRRR

NOT YET...
I'VE GOT TO
FIND A WAY TO
SHUT THIS SCALY
BLAST FURNACE
DOWN!



YOU CAN'T, ALEX --
NO ONE CAN! WE
ALL HAVE TO GET
TO COVER!

DOOM
DOOM
DOOM
DOOM
DOOM



WE COULD
GO TO
JERSEY!

THEN TAKE HER
THERE. I'LL JOIN YOU
LATER, IF I CAN --
BUT I'M STAYING!



ZOPHIE...
WAIT...



I'LL
SURVIVE --
AND I'LL FIND
YOU SOON, I
PROMISE.

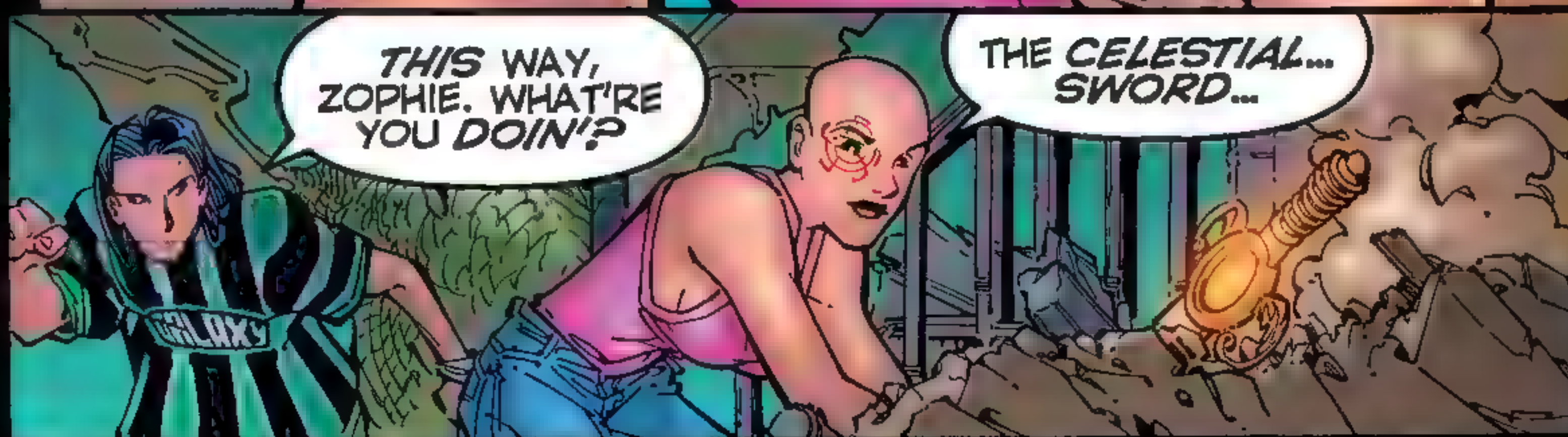
YOU KNOW, I
BELIEVE YOU WILL.



SSNAARR!

NOW
GO!

YEAH...
OKAY --
C'MON, ZOPH.



THIS WAY,
ZOPHIE. WHAT'RE
YOU DOIN'?

THE CELESTIAL...
SWORD...



YOU'RE
NOT THE ONLY
ONE WITH FIRE,
BARNEY...

WHOOOSS!



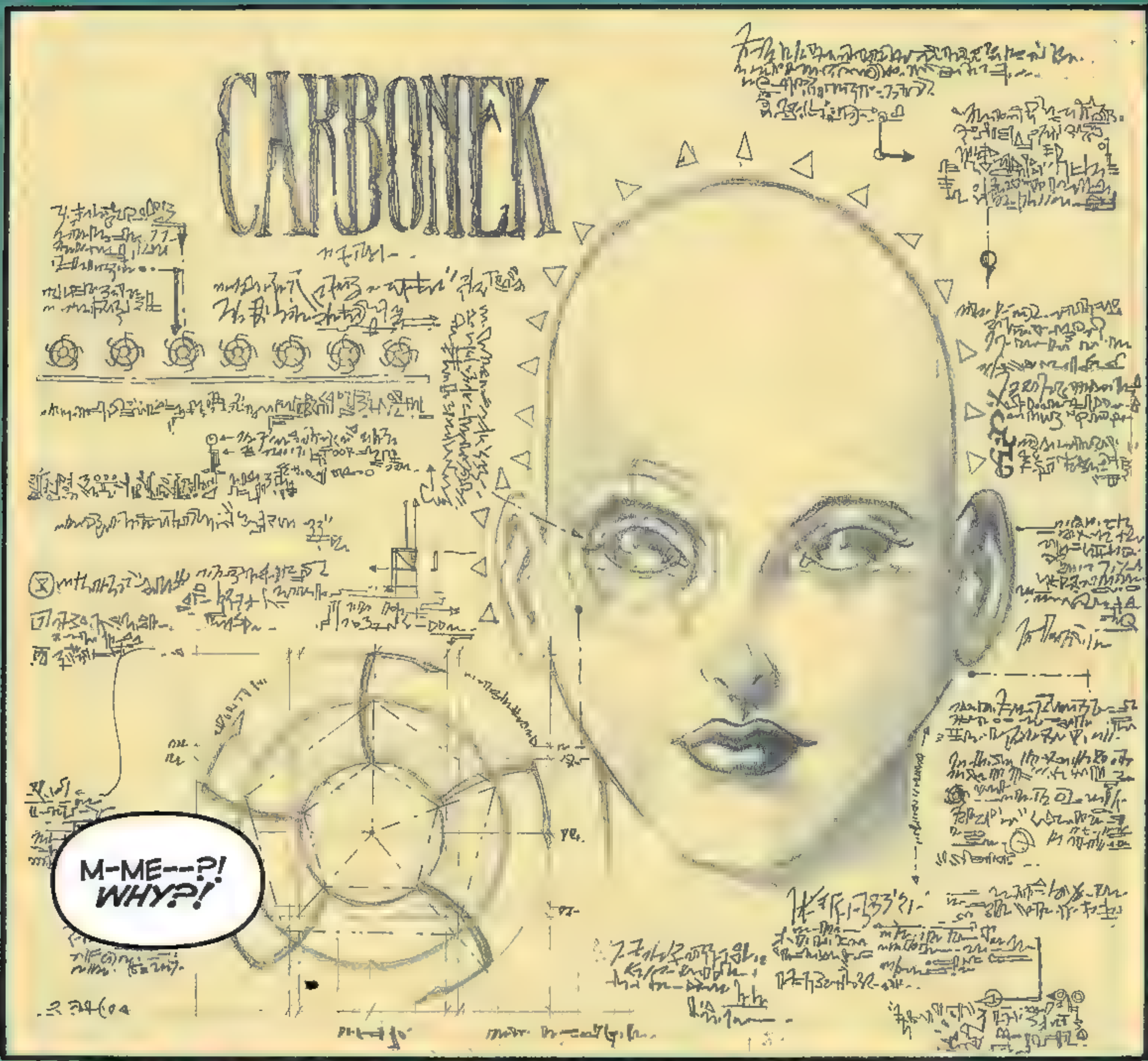
ONE
OF TAN'S
BOOKS.

HE'S DEAD,
HE WON'T NEED
IT -- NEITHER WILL
WE. LET'S GO!



HE SAID
THEY WERE
PROPHESIES!

JOE!
THE BOOK
OPENS -- ON
ITS OWN!



M-ME--?!
WHY?!



I DON'T
KNOW -- AND
WE DON'T HAVE
TIME! LET'S
GO!

SHRRIP



THE BOOK
PAGE IS A KEY --
IT'LL BE VERY
IMPORTANT!

EVERYWHERE, PEOPLE SCREAM IN FEAR OF THE WORLD'S ENDING...

...THE LOOTERS ARE JUST AS AFRAID, BUT WHEN THEY GO, THEY'LL HAVE A DVD PLAYER TO EASE THE PAIN.

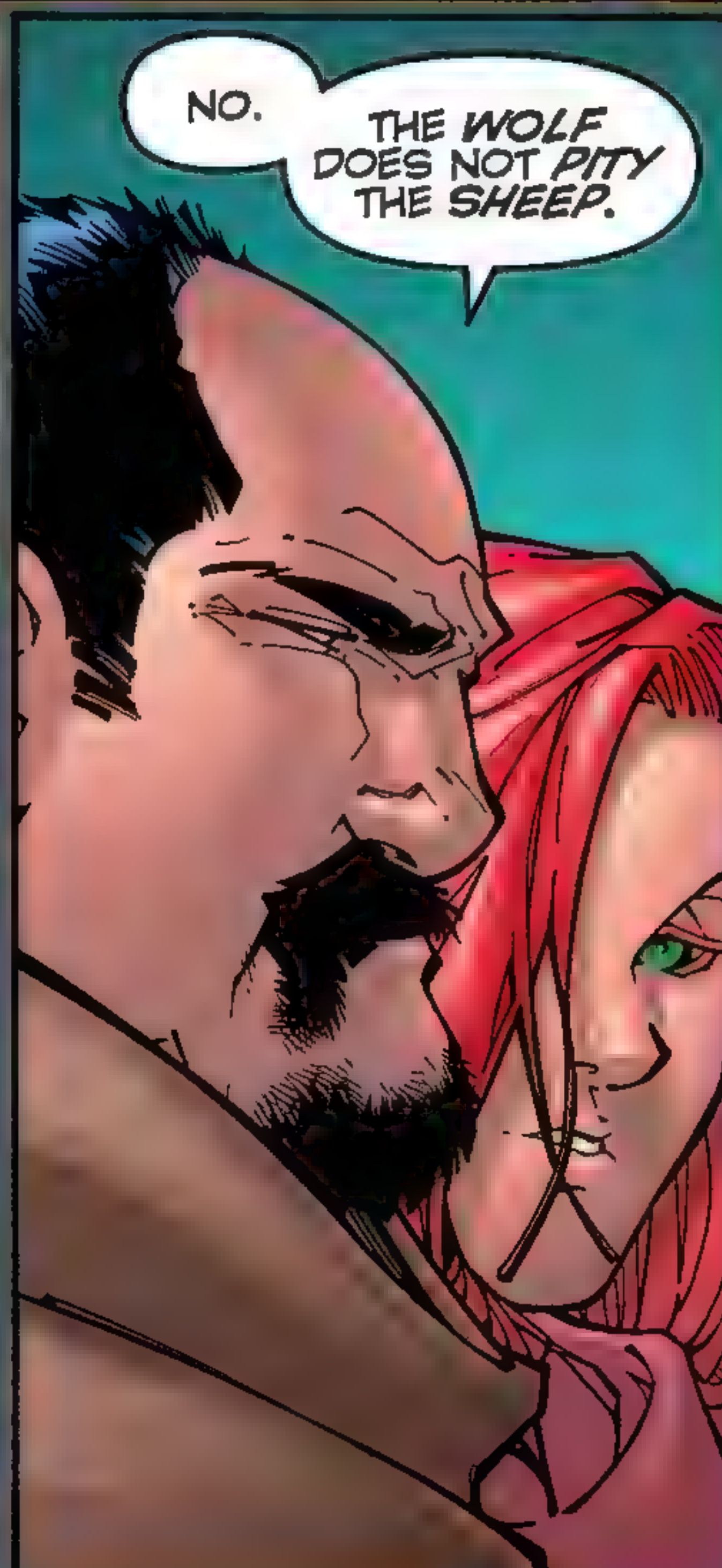


BEHOLD YOUR FORMER "PEOPLE," SCARLET THINBAULT -- NOTHING BUT JACKALS NOW!

YES DUMAS, WE SHOULD DO... SOMETHING, NO?

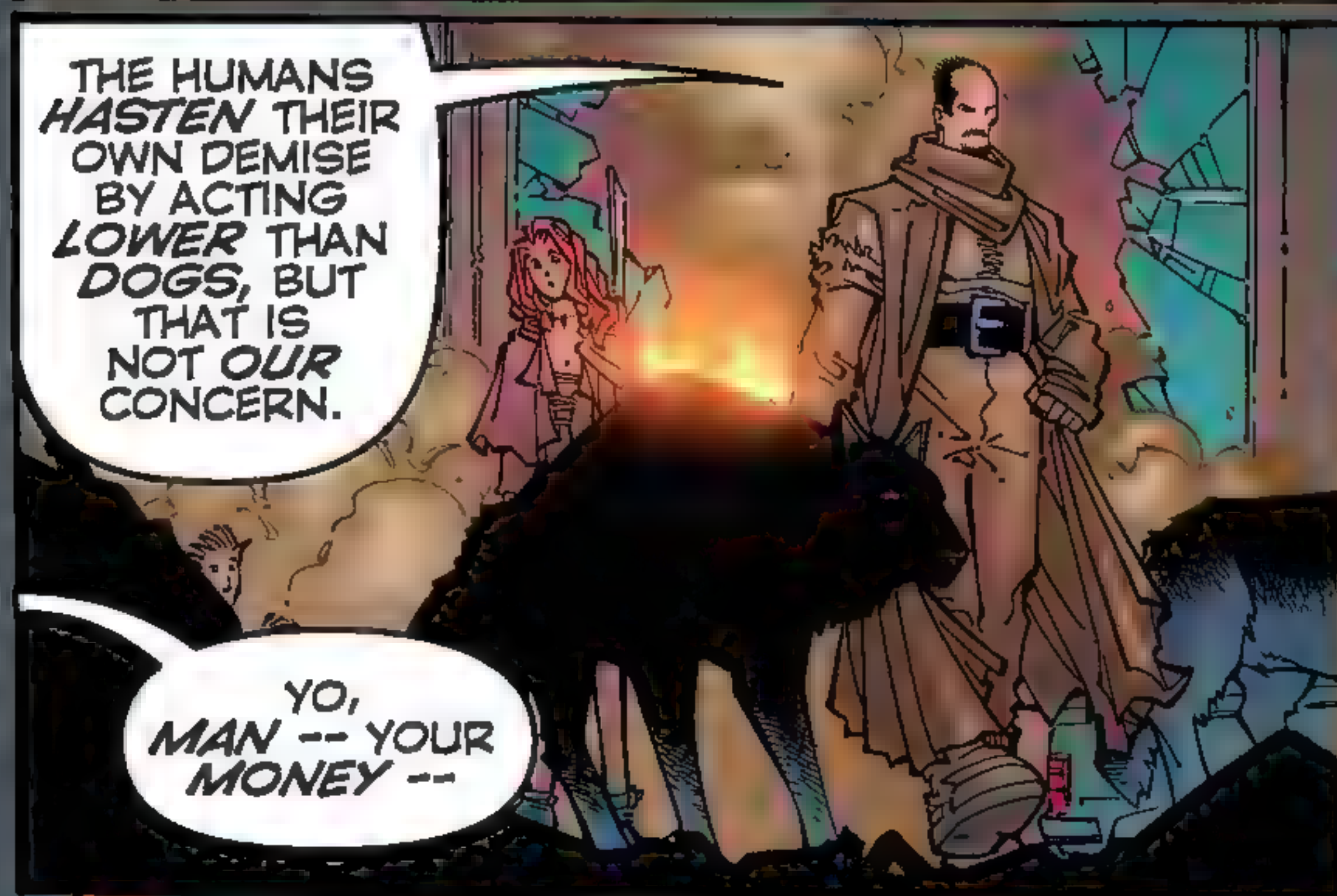


NO. THE WOLF DOES NOT PITY THE SHEEP.



THE HUMANS HASTEN THEIR OWN DEMISE BY ACTING LOWER THAN DOGS, BUT THAT IS NOT OUR CONCERN.

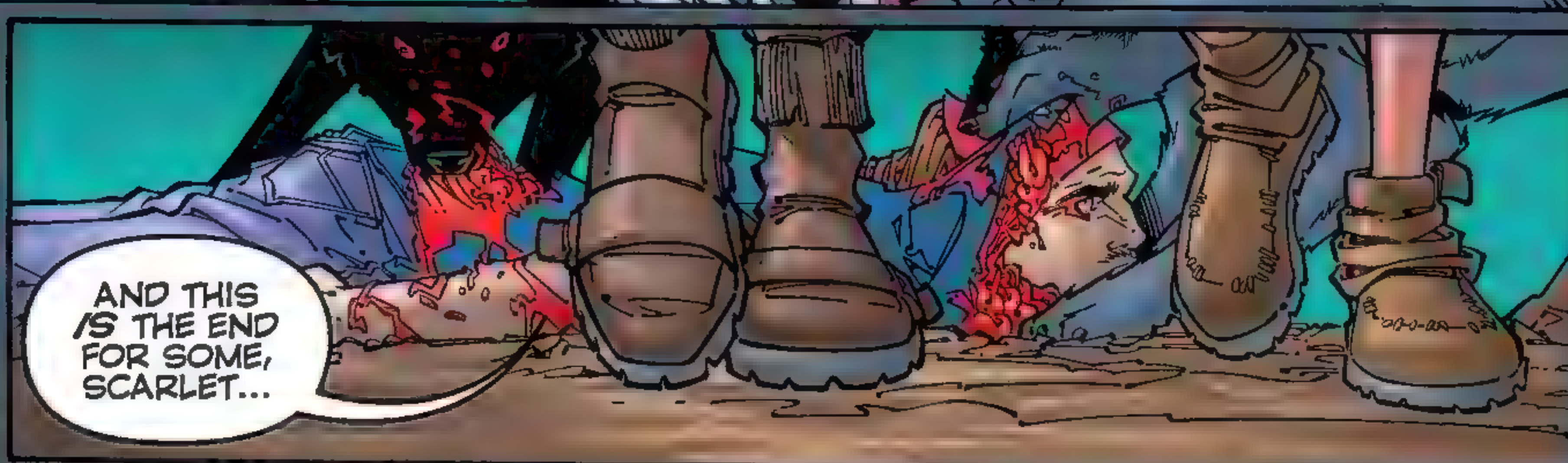
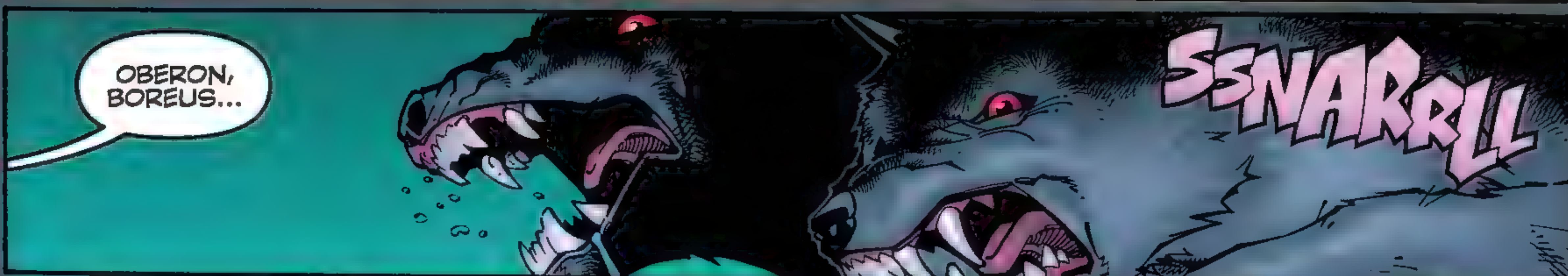
YO, MAN -- YOUR MONEY --

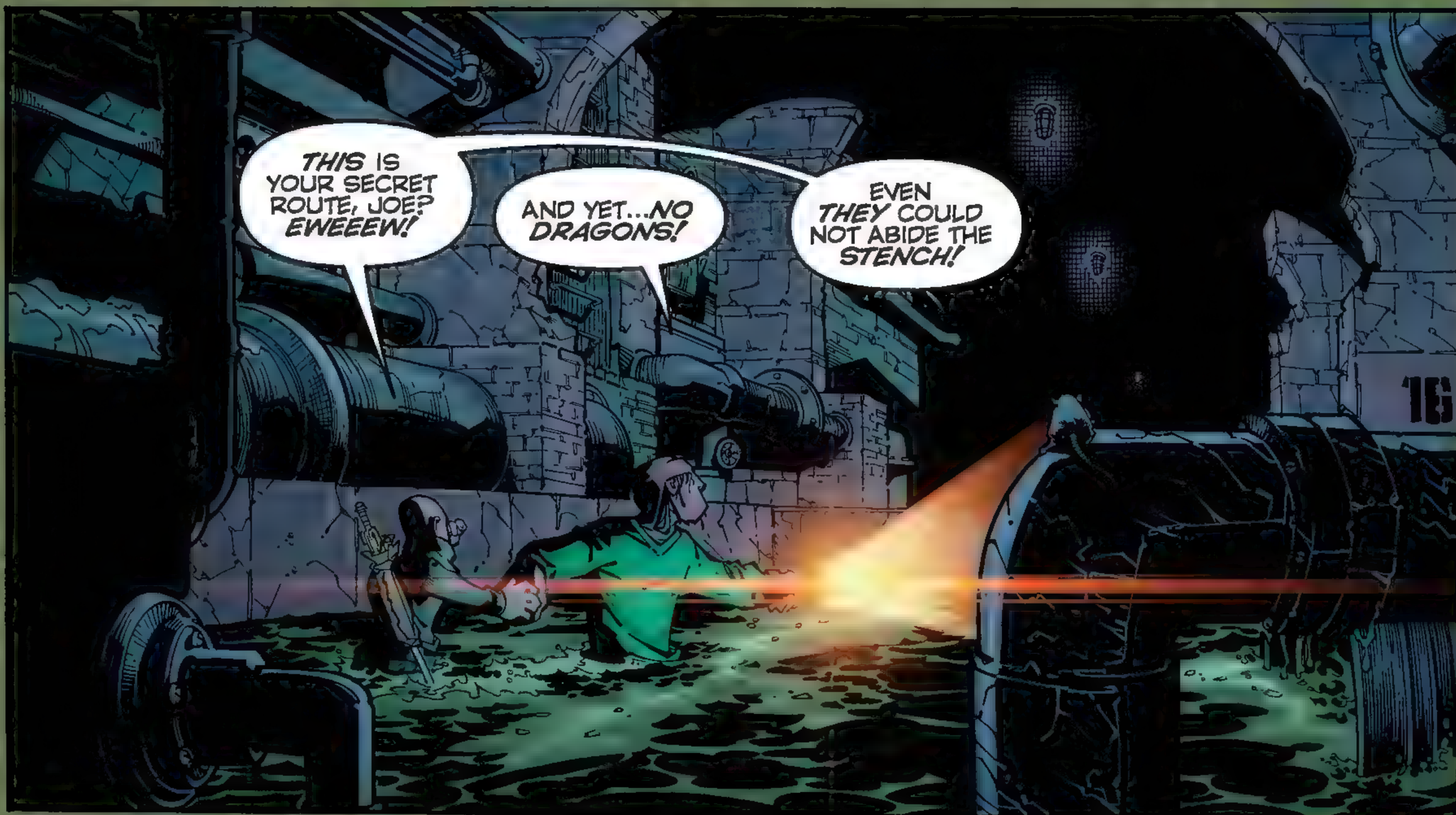


-- OR YOUR BLOOD!

MY BLOOD WOULD KILL YOU, FOOL!





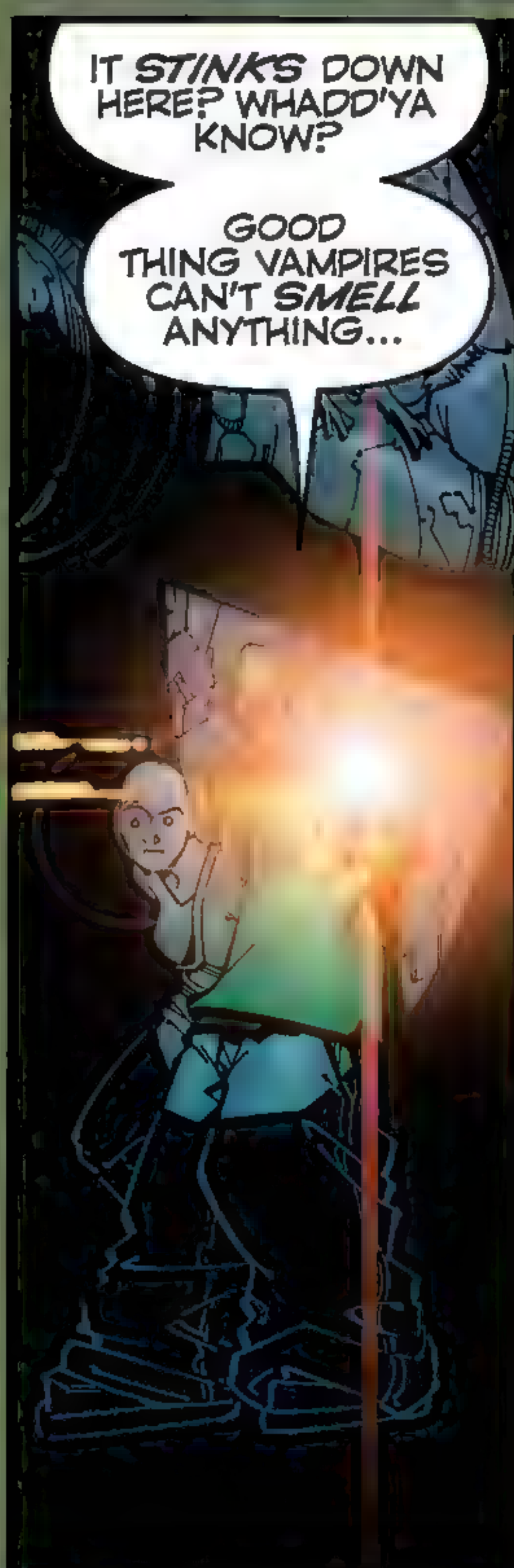


THIS IS
YOUR SECRET
ROUTE, JOE?
EWEEEW!

AND YET...NO
DRAGONS!

EVEN
THEY COULD
NOT ABIDE THE
STENCH!

16



IT *STINKS* DOWN
HERE? WHADD'YA
KNOW?

GOOD
THING VAMPIRES
CAN'T *SMELL*
ANYTHING...



NOW LET ME
CONCENTRATE -- IT'S
BEEN A WHILE SINCE I'VE
GONE THIS WAY AN' I
DON'T WANT TO GET
US *LOST*.

IT'S VERY COMPLEX
DOWN HERE, TAKE
A WRONG TURN
AT BROADWAY AND
F'GEDDABOUTIT!

WE'RE
ALREADY
LOST--IN THE
WORLD'S
LARGEST
URINAL!



...AND
I THINK WE'RE
WRONG ABOUT THE
STINK KEEPING
THE DRAGON
AWAY...

..SOME
DRAGONS ARE *WATER*
FAMILIARS -- AND *ANY*
DRAGON CAN FOLLOW
THE SCENT OF A
HEAVENLY OBJECT...



YOU MEAN THEY
CAN TRACK THAT
PIG-STICKER?!



I GUESS
YOU'LL HAVE TO
ASK...*HIM*.

RRRRR

RUN!!!

YA' THINK...?

IT'S TOO
FAST! IT'S
GONNA--

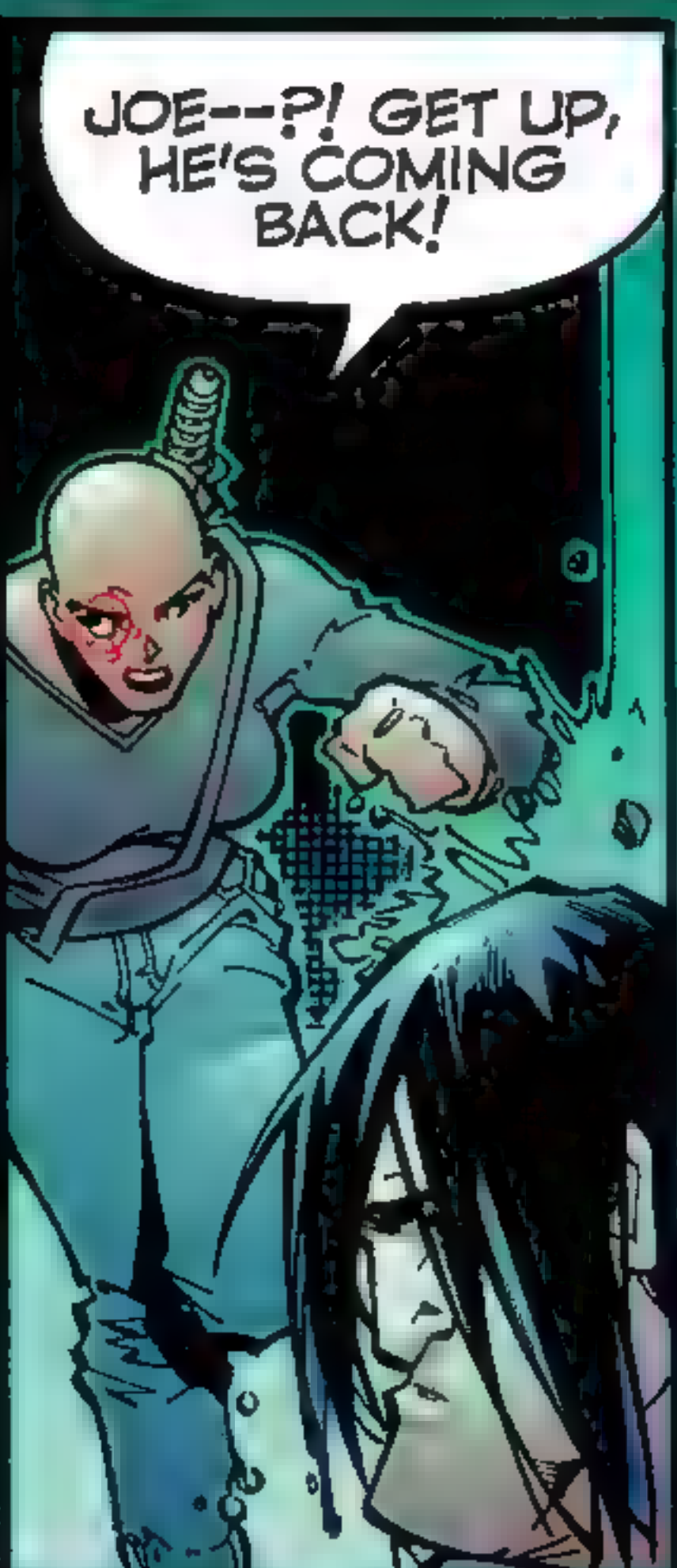
**ROW
WW
WW
MM
P**

SSSSH

FLOOOSSH

GET TOPSIDE IN A
HURRY, ZOPH -- I'LL
DISTRACT 'IM!

YO',
MONSTRO --
YOU WAN' SOME
OF THIS--?



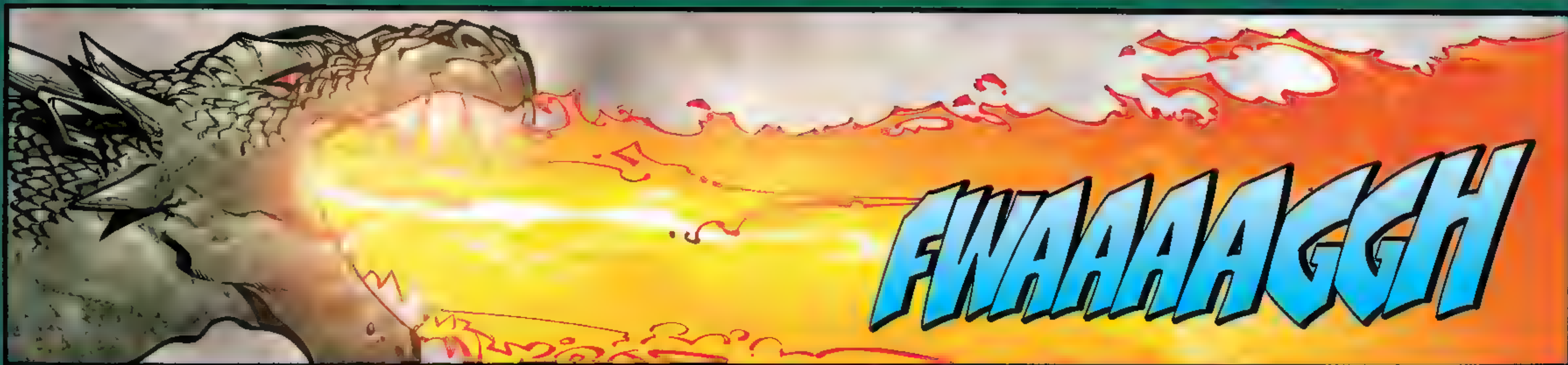
MEANWHILE.

Hssssssss-

COME ON!
LET'S SEE
WHAT YOU'VE
GOT...



FWAAAAAGGH



YEAH,
THAT'S RIGHT,
I CAN FLY--

--MAYBE
RIGHT
DOWN
YOUR
THROAT!

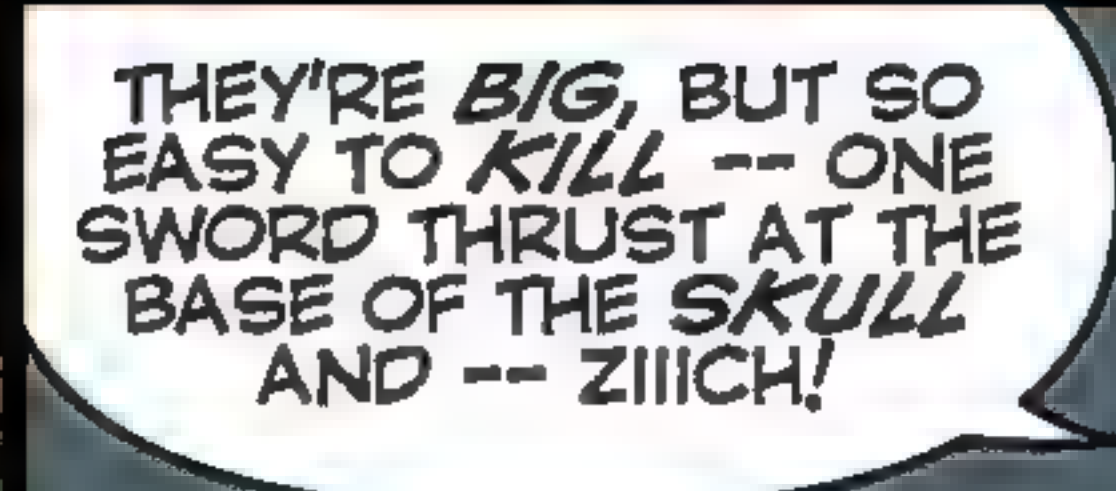
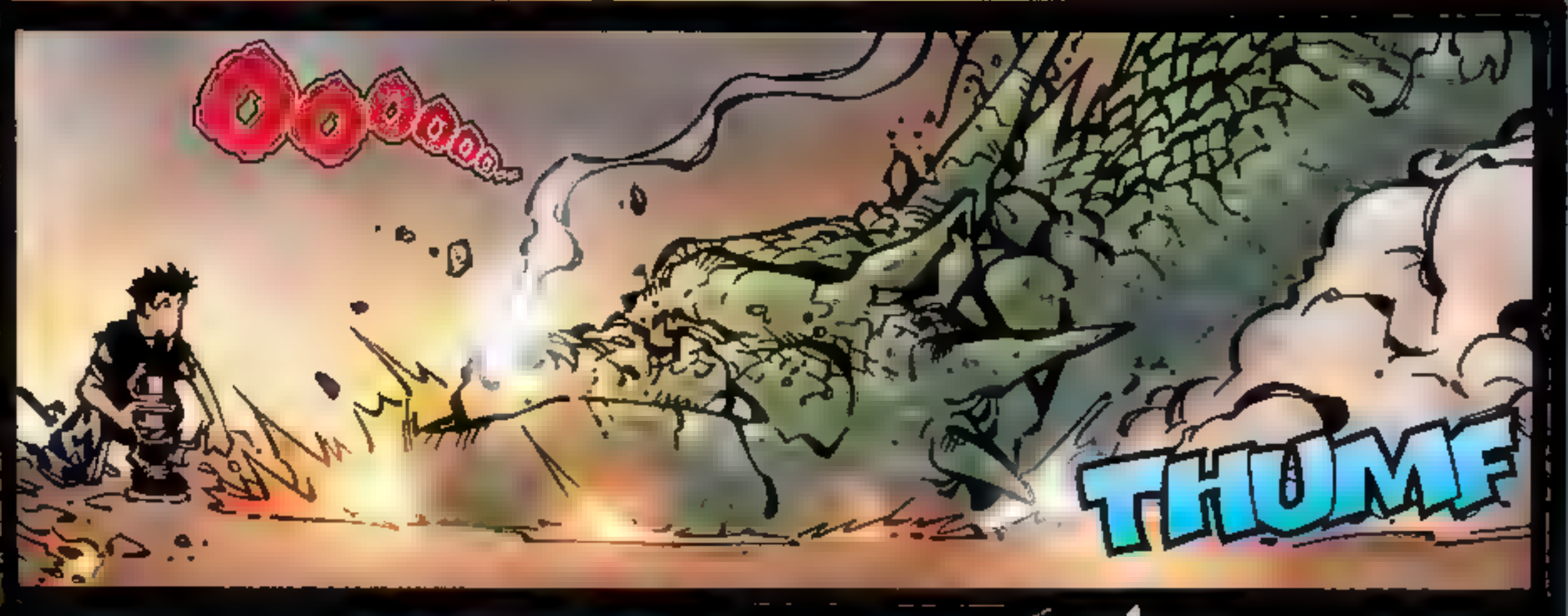
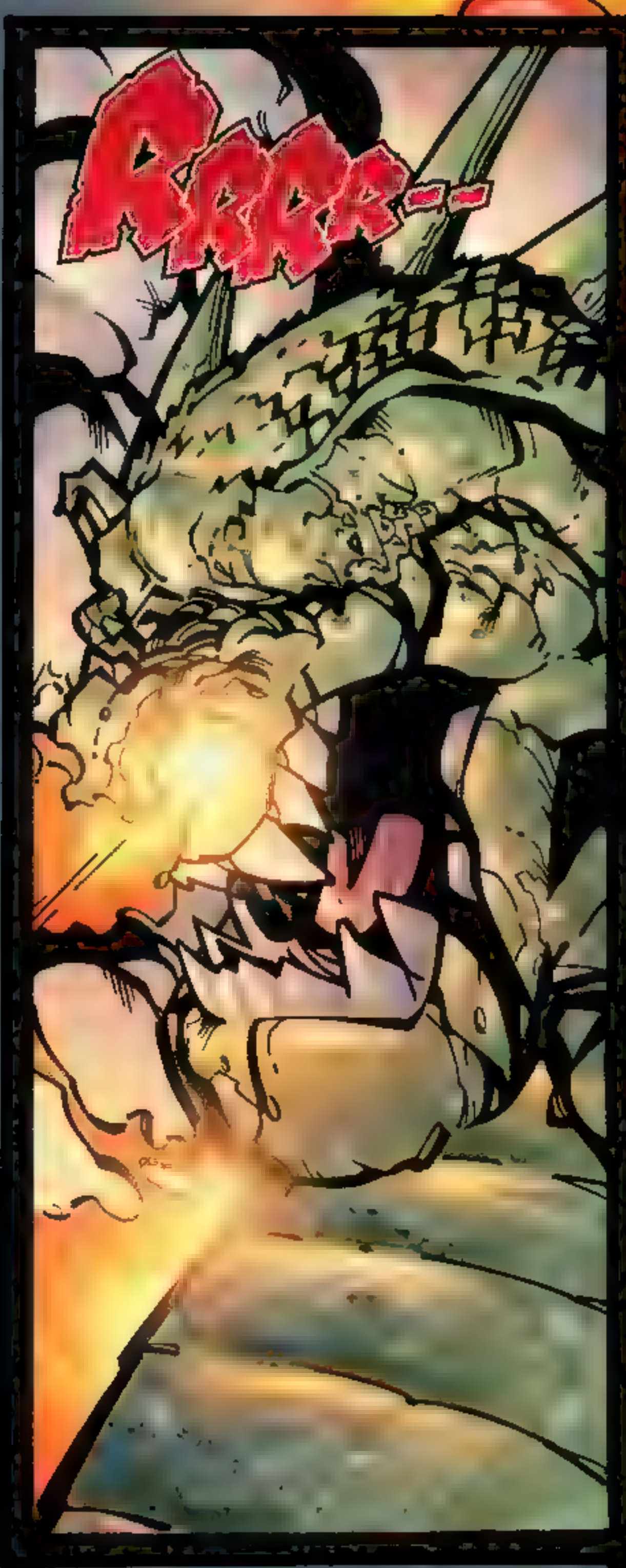
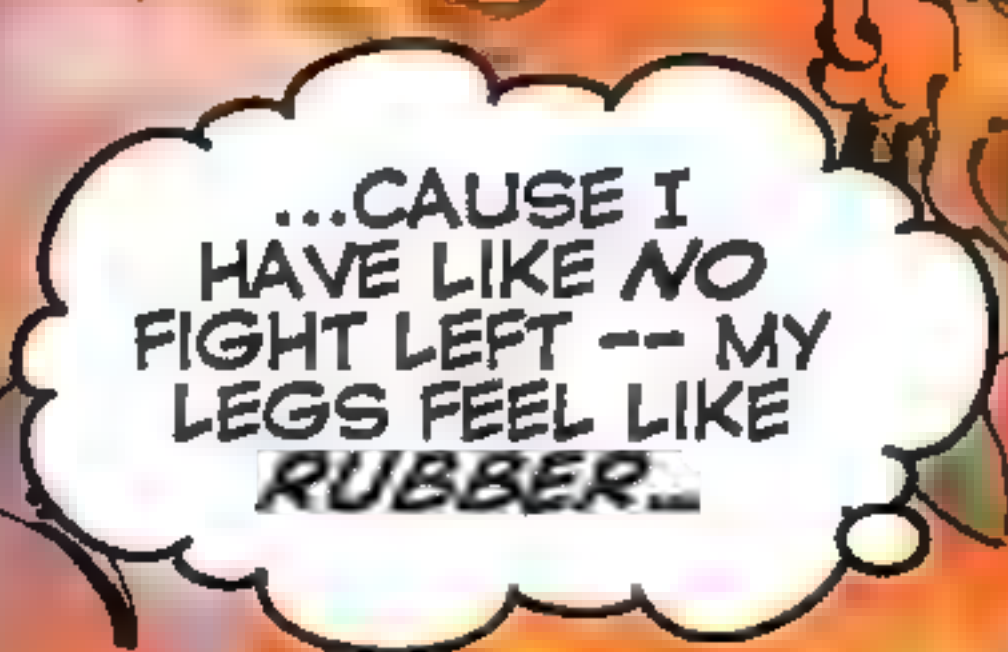
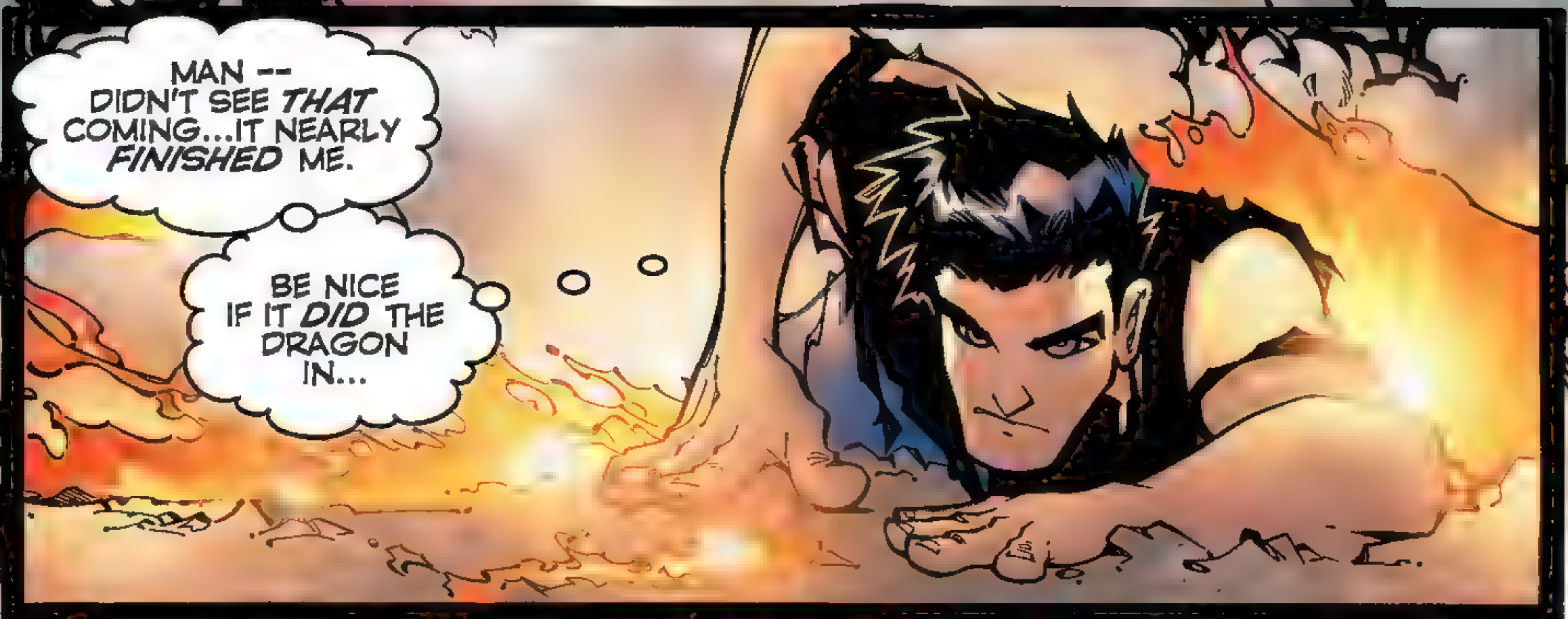
SHOOOSCH

MISSED ME,
HOT-SHOT...

THE
CAR'S GAS
TANK--?!

BOOM





IN CENTRAL PARK, HUMAN CAPTIVES OF THE MARAUDING DRAGONS DO NOT ENJOY THEIR BUCOLIC SURROUNDINGS...

AHROOOOOO

WHAT WILL THE DRAGONS DO WITH THOSE PEOPLE?

YOU DO NOT WANT TO KNOW.

ALL RIGHT -- WHERE ARE WE GOING?

AND WHY ARE THE DRAGONS LETTING US?

WE MARCH INTO THE VERY HEART OF THE SECRET YOU'VE SOUGHT SINCE THE MOUNTAINS.

WHAT DO YOU NEAR-MEN DESIRE HERE?

WE WISH AN AUDIENCE WITH THE GREAT MASTER --

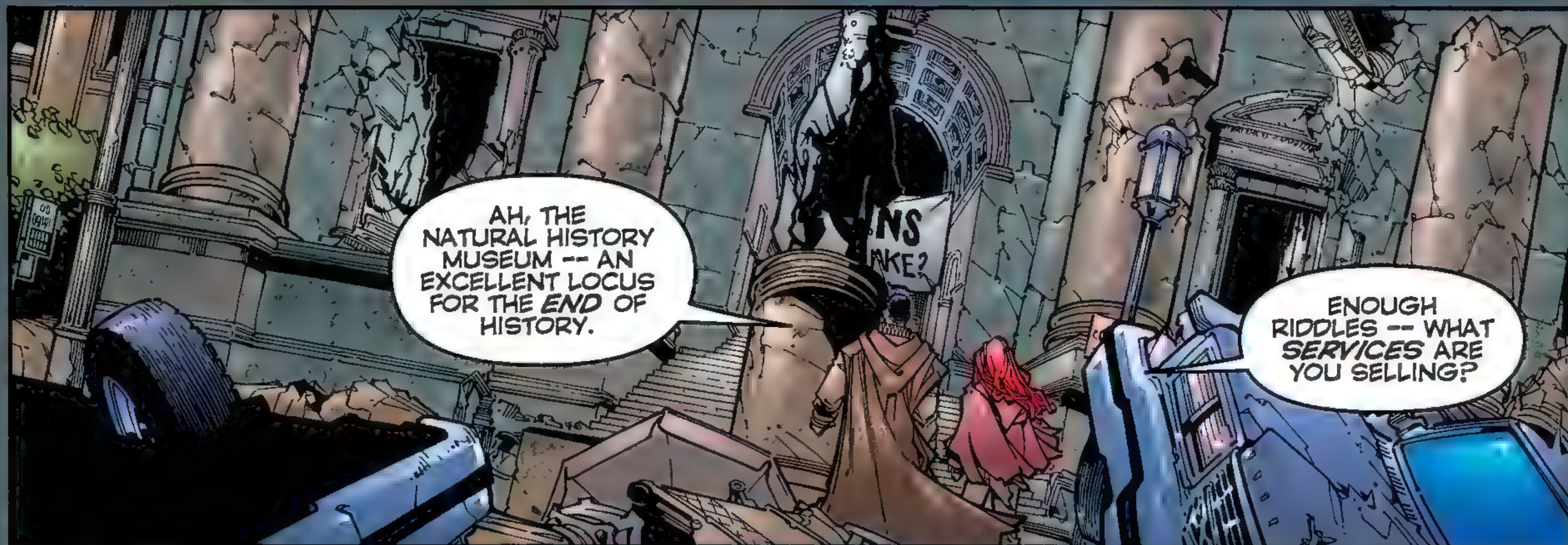
-- TO OFFER OUR SERVICES.

WE MOVE FREELY BECAUSE THE BEASTS SENSE THAT WE ARE NOT HUMAN.



HA-HA-
HA-HA-HA
HA!

BY ALL
MEANS --
TRAVEL ON!
HEH-HEH...

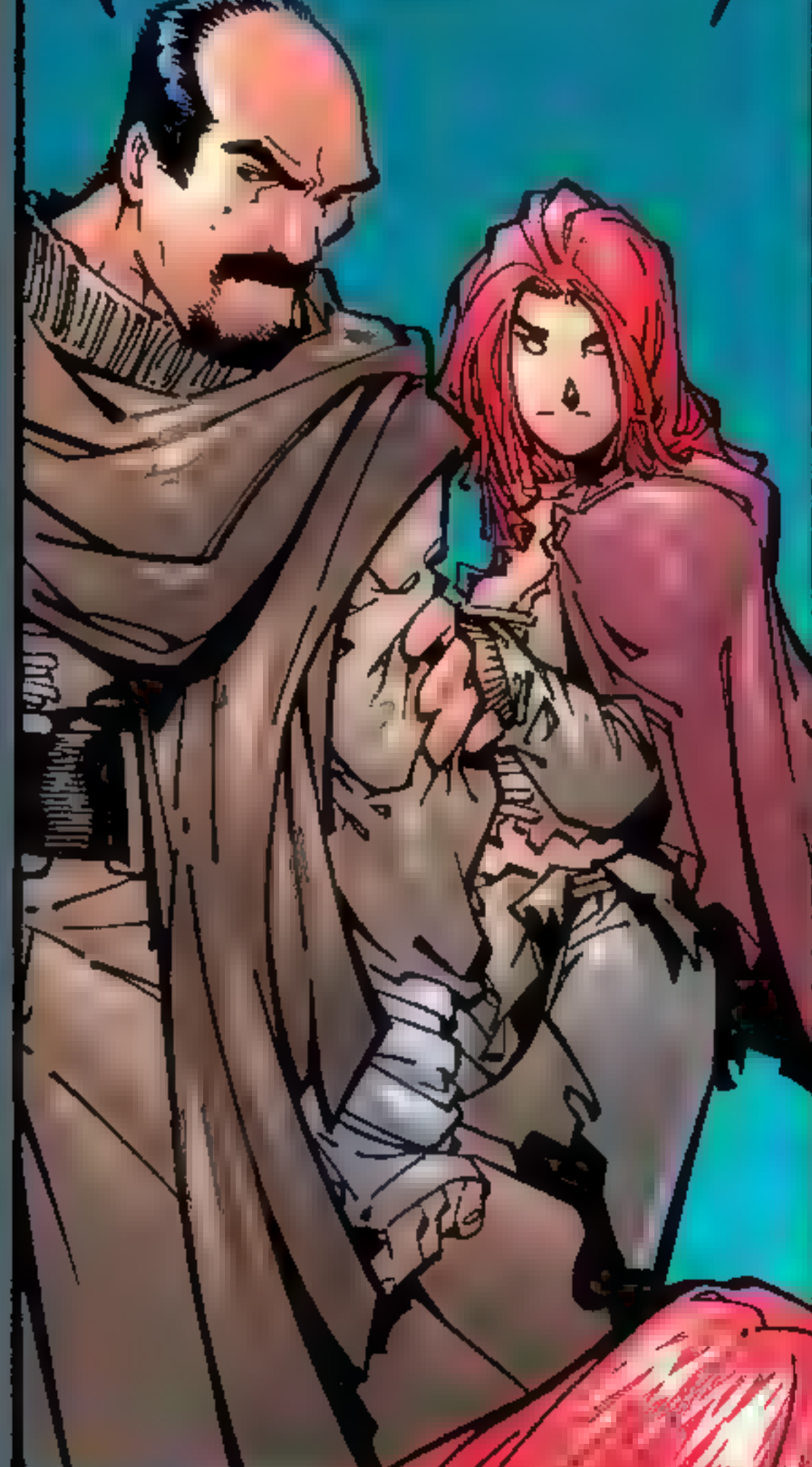


AH, THE
NATURAL HISTORY
MUSEUM -- AN
EXCELLENT LOCUS
FOR THE END OF
HISTORY.

ENOUGH
RIDDLES -- WHAT
SERVICES ARE
YOU SELLING?

DUMAS! ANSWER ME --
WHAT IS GOING ON?!

THE GUARD IS
CHANGING, MAYBE
FOREVER -- BEST TO
ALIGN WITH THE
WINNING SIDE...



THEN YOU APES
HAVE CHOSEN
WELL...



...WELCOME TO
MY SERVICE --
I AM SAPHA,
LORD OF THE
CHALKYDIRI!

A SEWER IS LIKE LIFE...
WHAT YOU GET OUT OF
IT, DEPENDS ON WHAT
YOU PUT INTO IT.

WE'RE IN
CHINATOWN, JOE --
WHERE DO WE GO
FROM HERE?

GOOD
PLACE FOR
DIM SUM
UP THE
STREET...





NICE CUTTING ---
WHY DIDN'T YOU DO
THAT BEFORE?

WHEN I
WAS BANISHED
FROM HEAVEN, MY
OLD SKILLS FADED...



...AS A HUMAN, IT NOW TAKES
MUCH EFFORT TO REMEMBER
THE MOVES... AND NEARLY
ALL MY STRENGTH.

WELL, IF
KILLING ONE
OF THESE BABIES
WIPES YOU OUT,
WE BETTER NOT
RUN INTO ANY
MORE...



ELSEWHERE.



HE'S HURTING ---
LET'S FINISH THE
BIG TOAD!

YEA

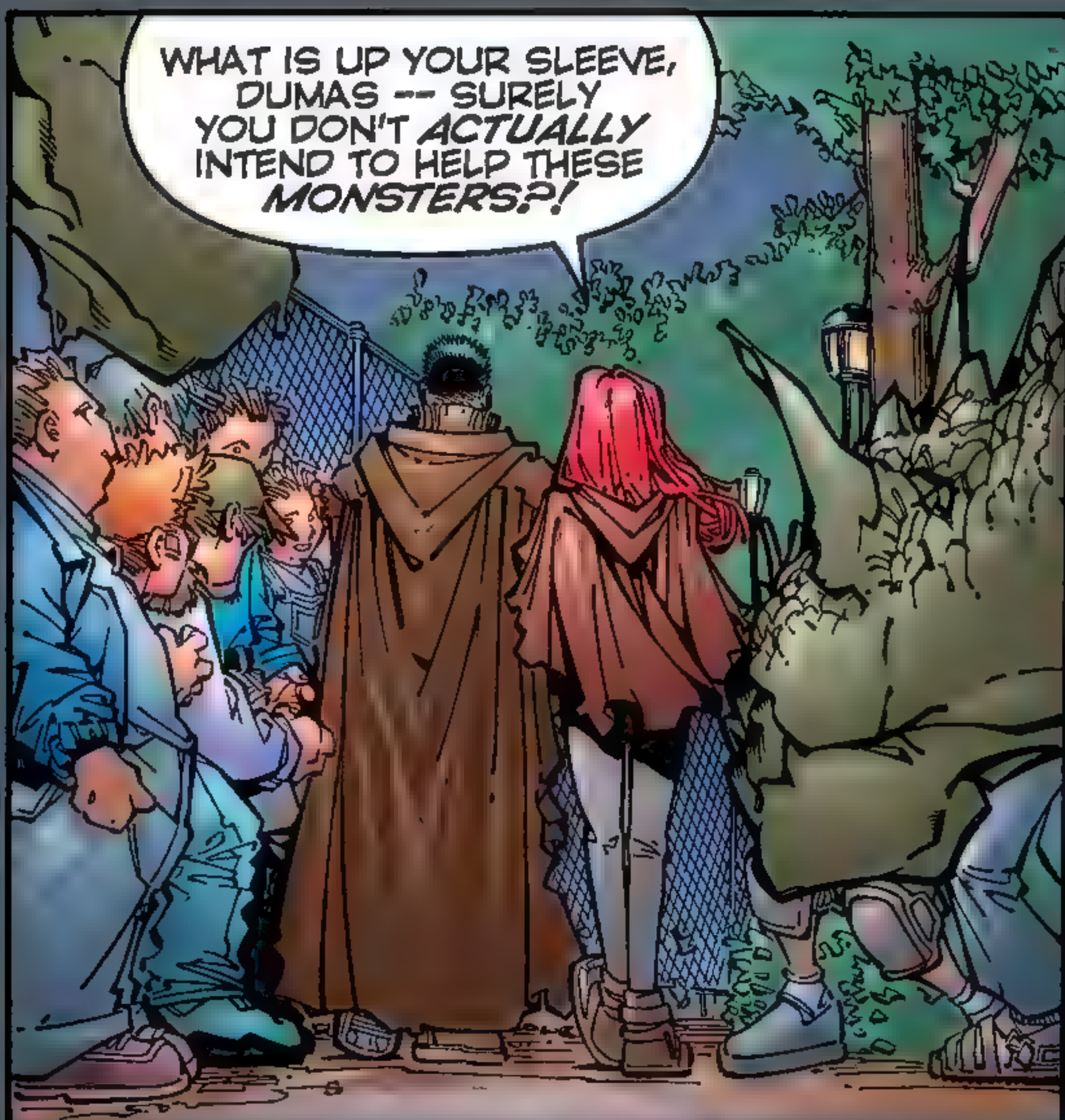


AH, THE HUMAN
SPIRIT IS UN-
CRUSHABLE!

WE MAY YET
SURVIVE THIS
AFTER ALL.



OUT OF MY WAY, CATTLE --- **NOW!**



WHAT IS UP YOUR SLEEVE, DUMAS -- SURELY YOU DON'T **ACTUALLY** INTEND TO HELP THESE **MONSTERS?**



WE MAY BE OF THE WOLF'S BLOOD -- BUT WE ARE CLOSER TO THE HUMANS THAN TO THOSE **GARGOYLES!**

YOU ARE **WRONG**, WE ARE KINDRED TO THE BEASTS -- HUMANS HAVE **SOULS...**

...WHICH MAKES THEM WEAK, MAKES THEM **PREY.**



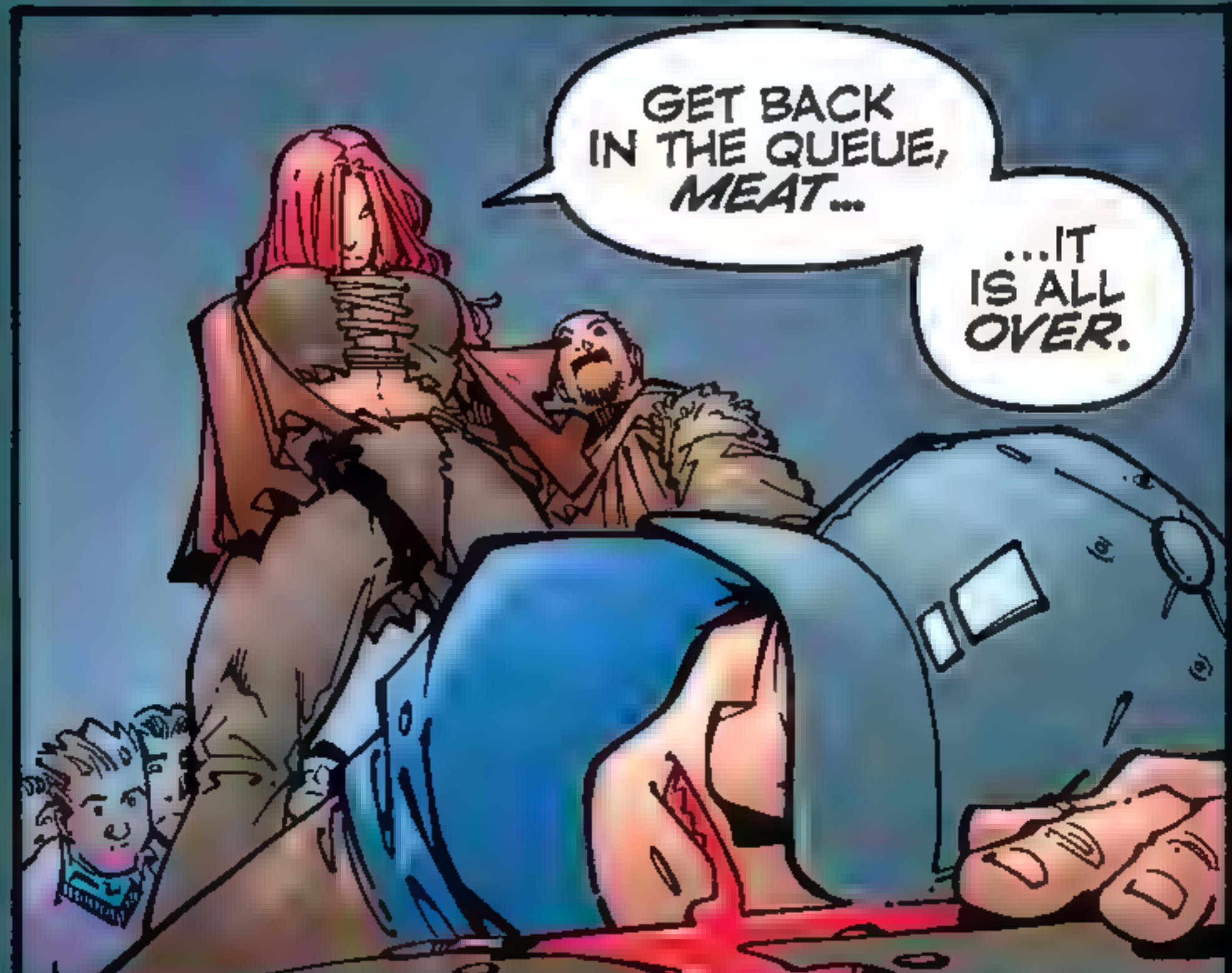
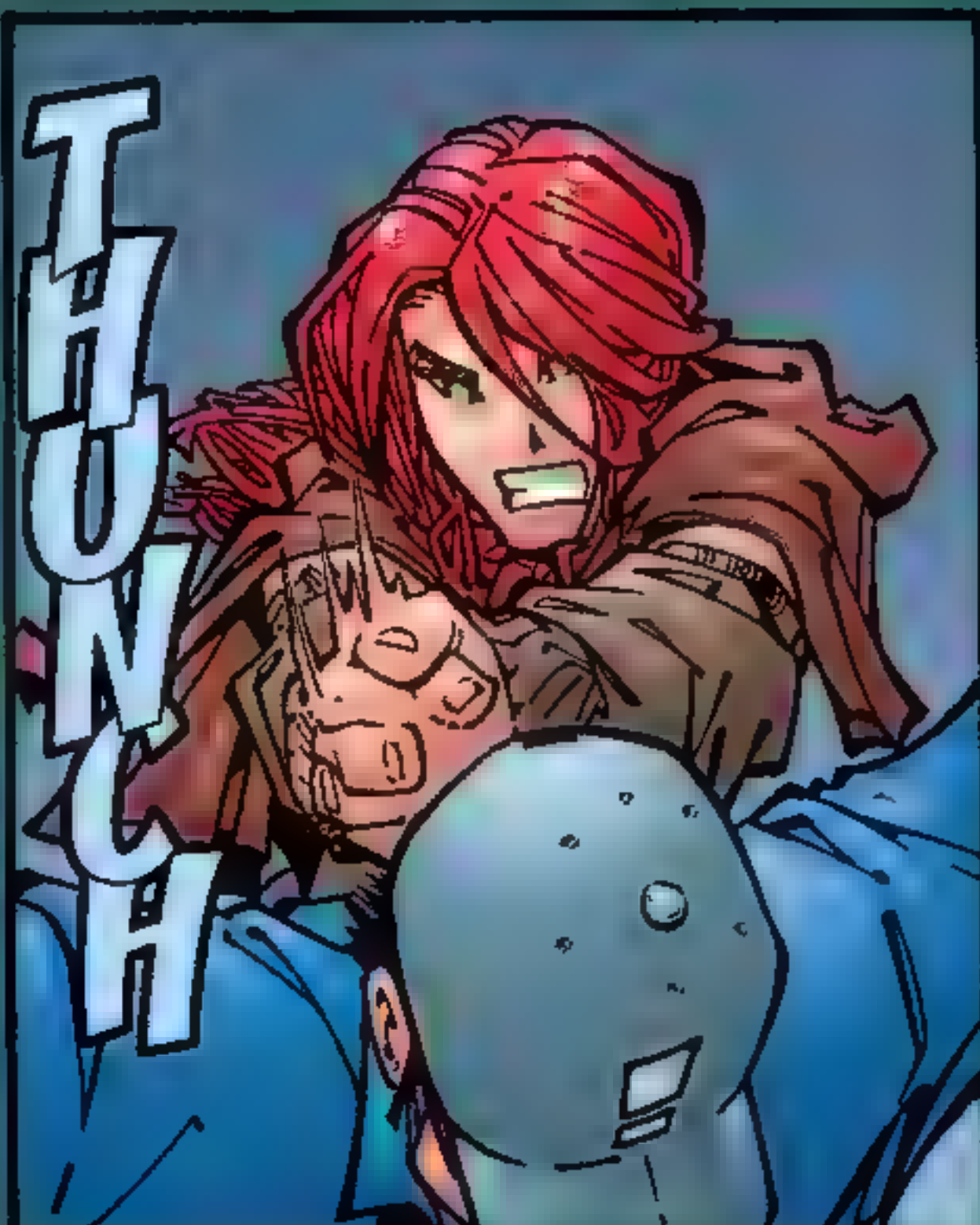
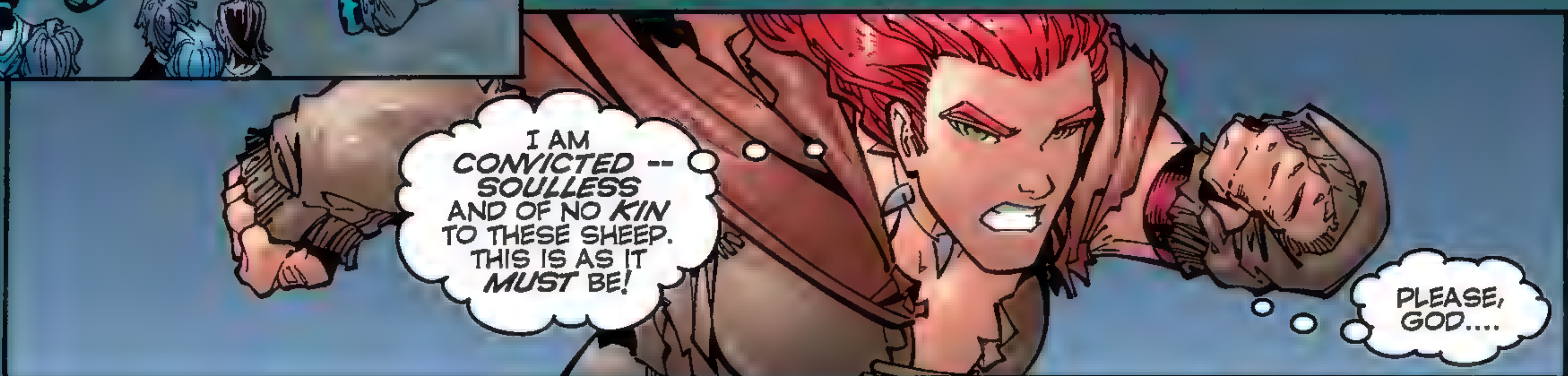
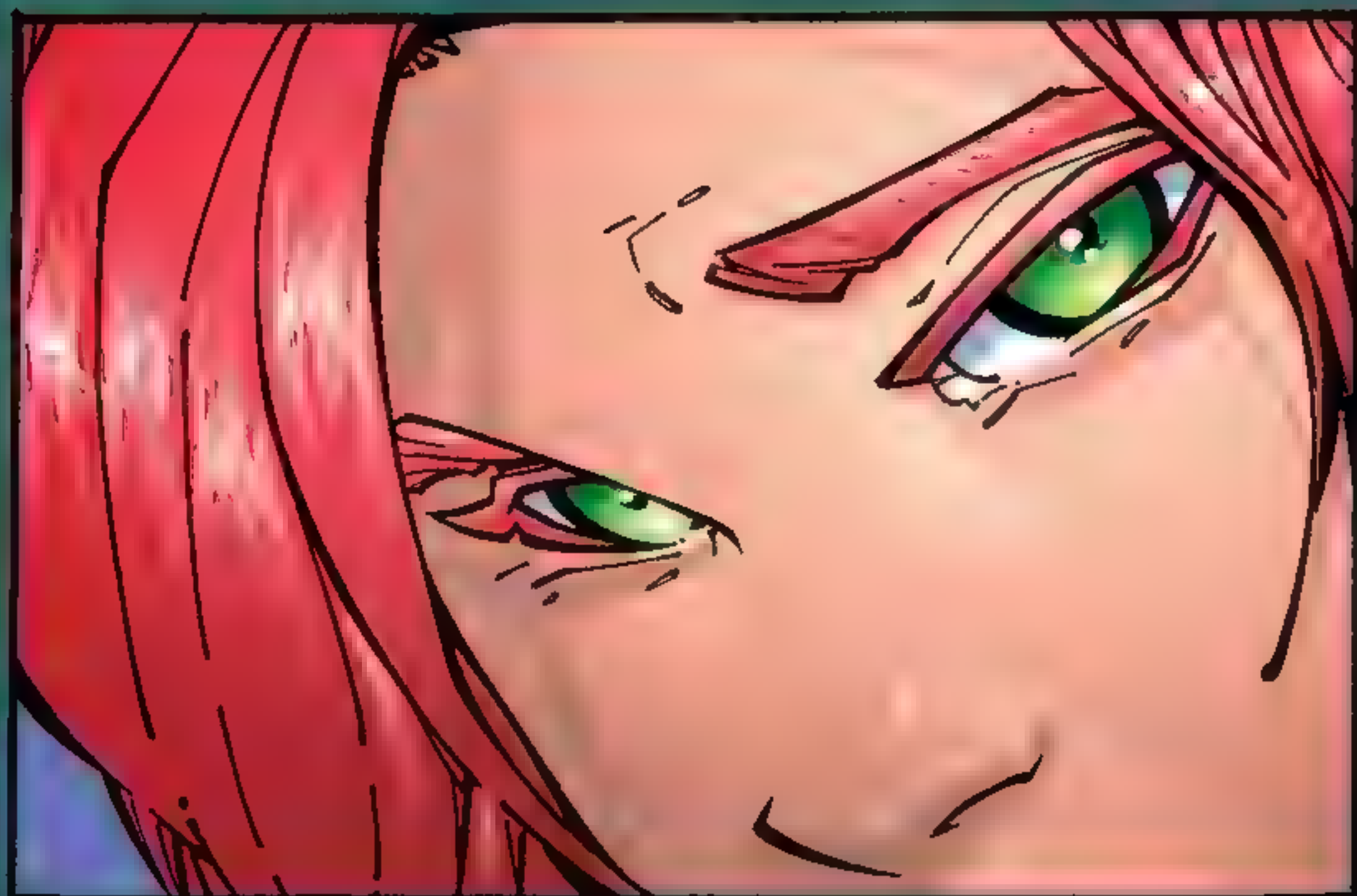
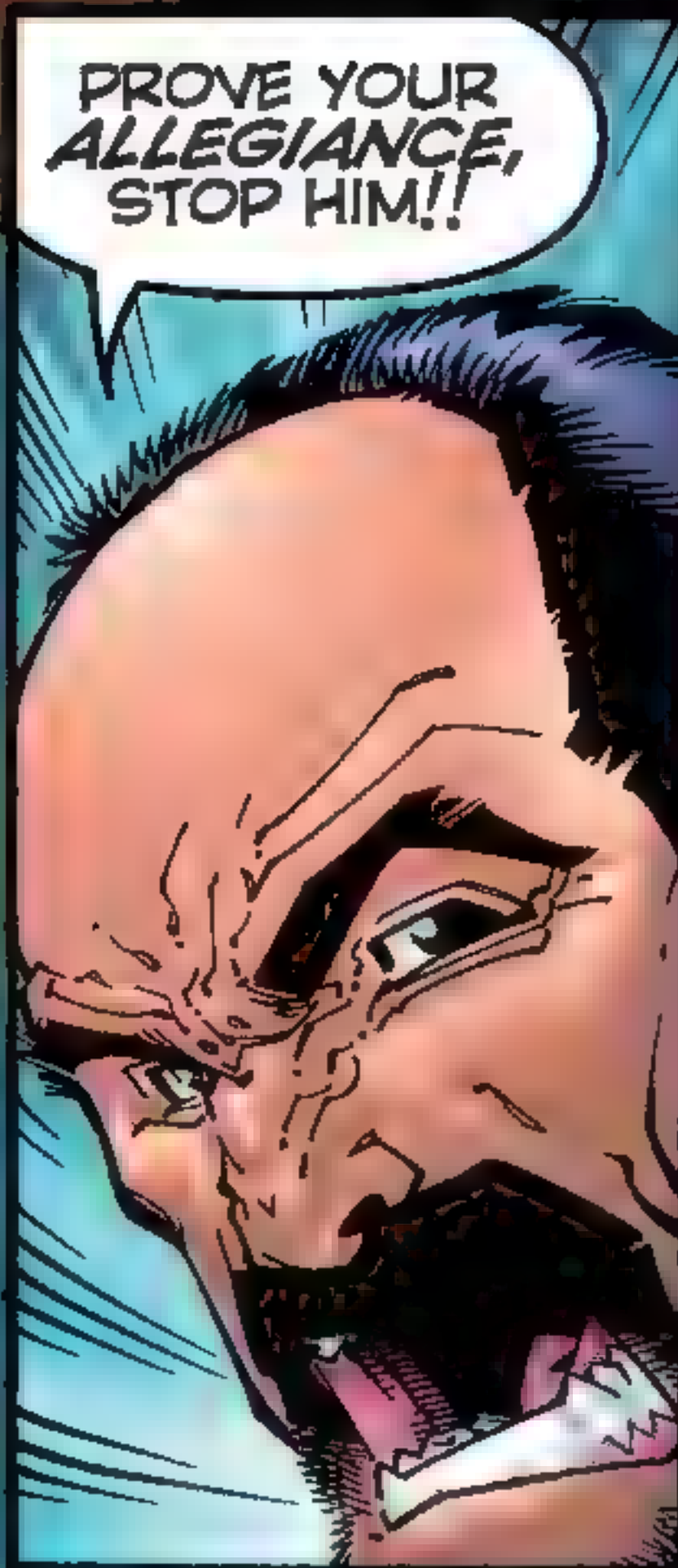
UNDERSTAND THIS, SCARLET -- THE DRAGONS **OWN** THE WORLD! NOT JUST NOW, **ALWAYS!**

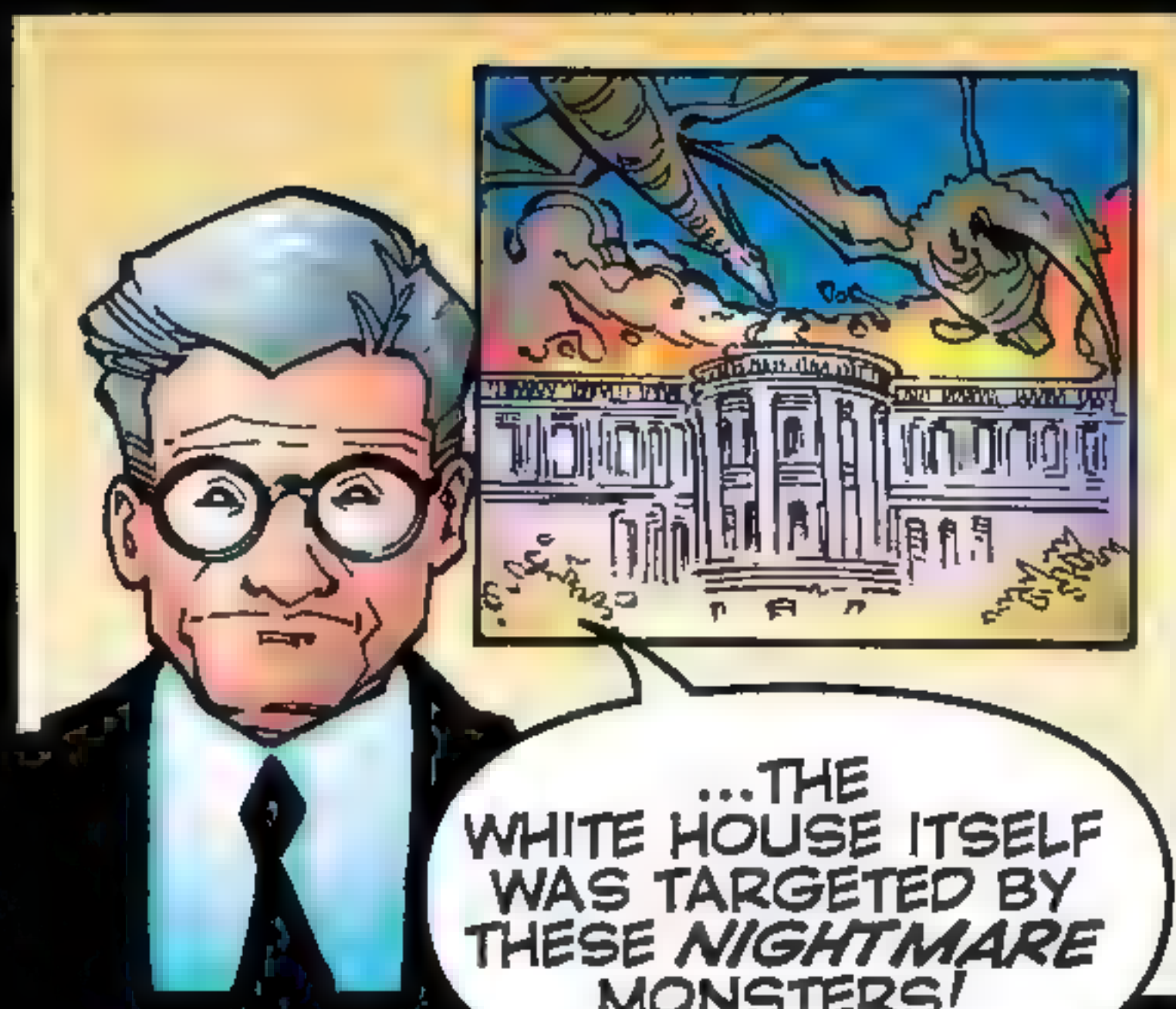
WHEN THE WORLD WAS STILL **COOLING** AFTER CREATION, THEIRS WERE THE **FIRST** PAWS TO TROD THE **STEAMING** SOIL!



FOR REASONS KNOWN ONLY TO THE **CREATOR**, THE HUMANS WERE GRANTED **PRECEDENCE** OVER THE DRAGONS...

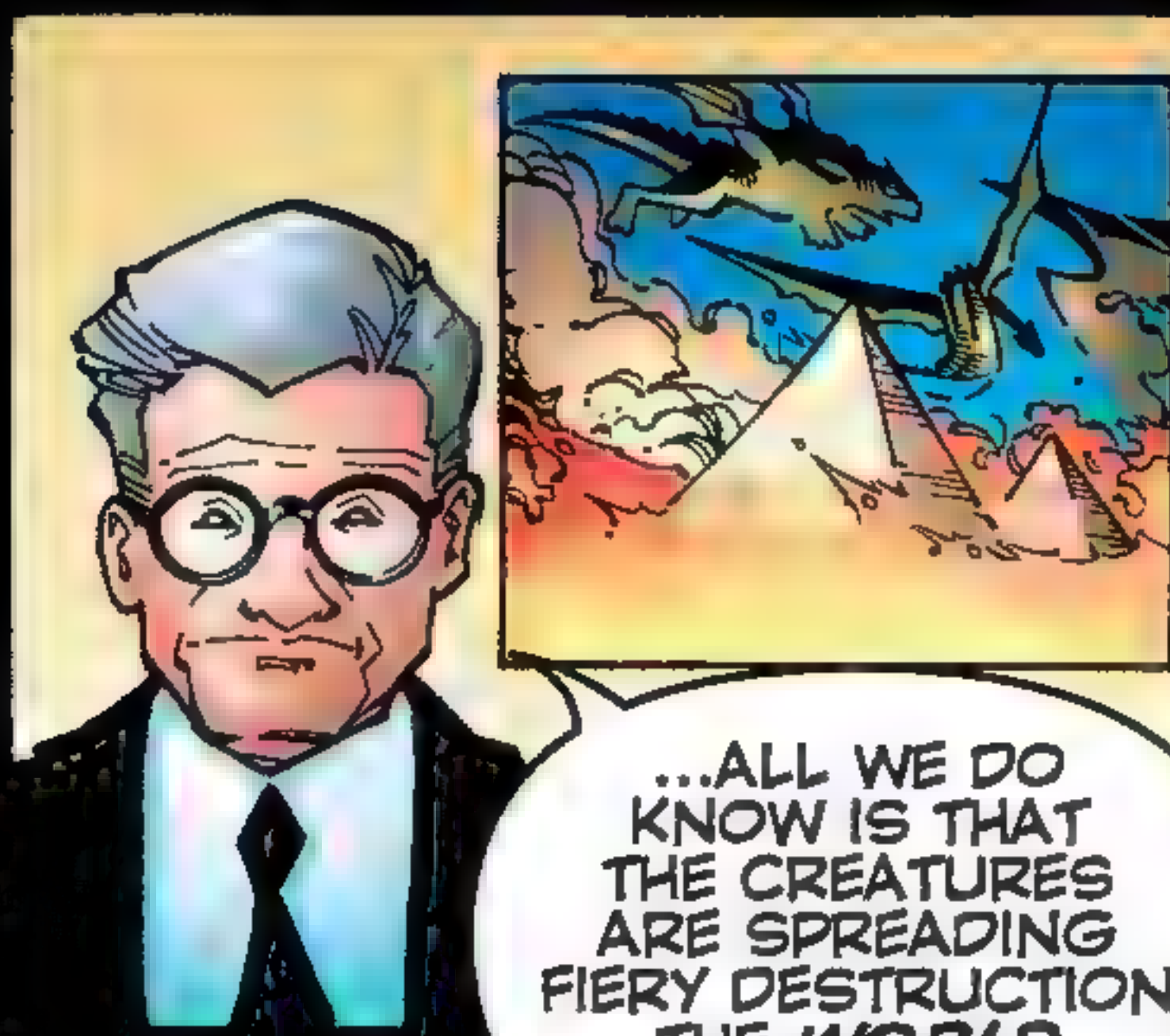
...AND THEY'VE BEEN PLOTTING TO TAKE IT **ALL** BACK FOR AN **ETERNITY** -- THEY WILL NOT BE **DENIED** THEIR **BIRTHRIGHT** AGAIN!





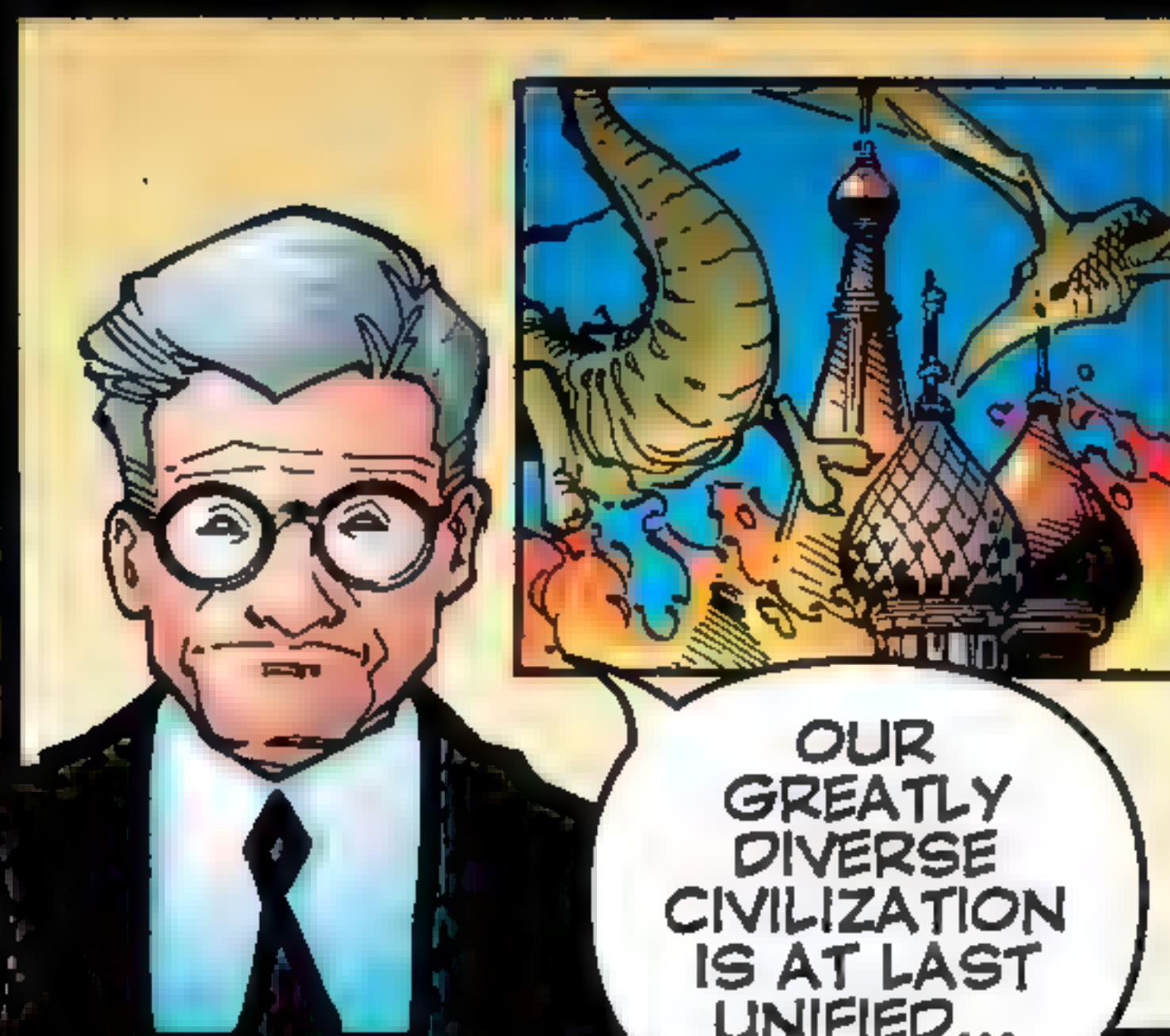
...THE WHITE HOUSE ITSELF WAS TARGETED BY THESE NIGHTMARE MONSTERS!

NO ONE YET KNOWS WHAT THESE THINGS WANT, FOR IT ISN'T CLEAR IF COMMUNICATION WITH THEM IS EVEN POSSIBLE...



...ALL WE DO KNOW IS THAT THE CREATURES ARE SPREADING FIERY DESTRUCTION THE WORLD OVER!

FRIEND AND FOE ALIKE, NO ONE HAS BEEN SAFE FROM THESE CEASELESS ATTACKS!

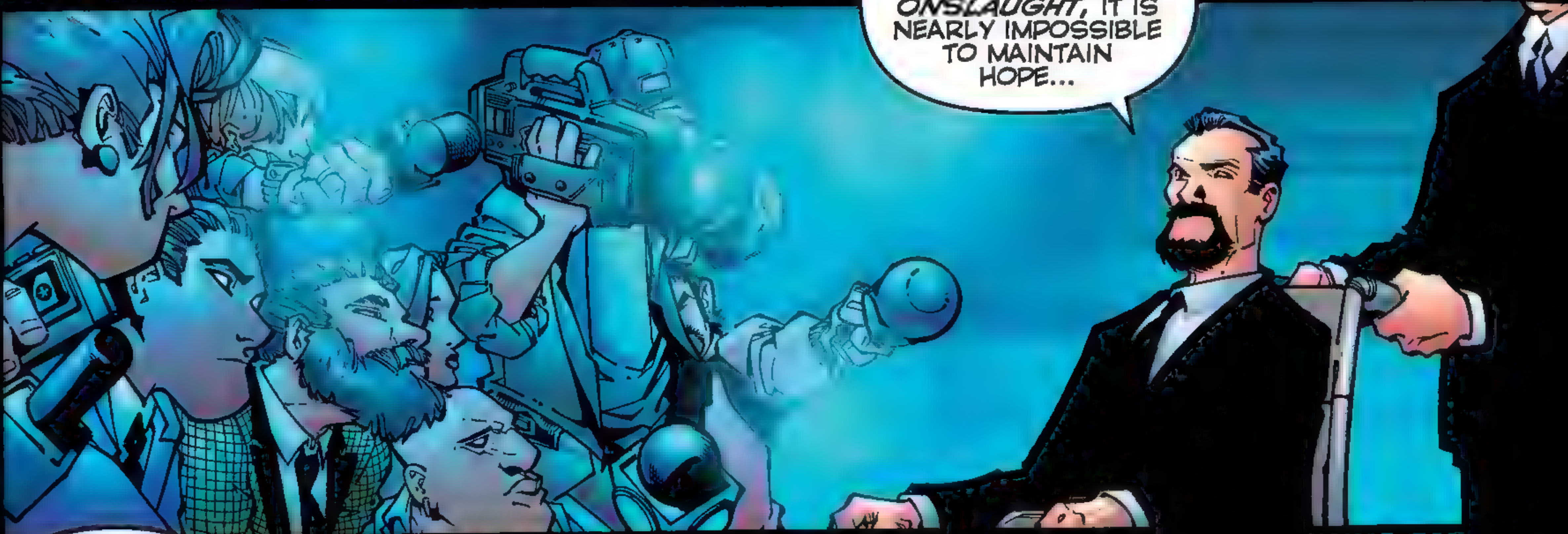


OUR GREATLY DIVERSE CIVILIZATION IS AT LAST UNIFIED...

...IN SHARED ANNIHILATION AND COMMON DESPAIR!

"WE NOW TAKE YOU LIVE TO NEW YORK AND SENATOR VICTOR VAN FLEET'S OFFICE WHERE THE SENATOR'S CHIEF AIDE, WILLIAM ELDER, IS PREPARING TO SPEAK."

AS WE FIND OURSELVES CRUSHED BENEATH THIS SENSELESS ONSLAUGHT, IT IS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO MAINTAIN HOPE...



...OUR GOVERNMENTS ARE FAILING, NEARLY BEATEN, OUR MILITARY RESOURCES ARE ALMOST EXHAUSTED...

...AS A PEOPLE WE HAVE ONLY THREE REAL OPTIONS...

RUN...

...GIVE UP...

...OR, PULL TOGETHER AND FIGHT BACK!

IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, WE REALLY ONLY HAVE ONE CHOICE... WE NEED TO TAKE BACK OUR WORLD -- AS ONE PEOPLE, UNITED IN OUR COMMON PURPOSE...





...AND
DEDICATED TO
OUR ULTIMATE
VICTORY!

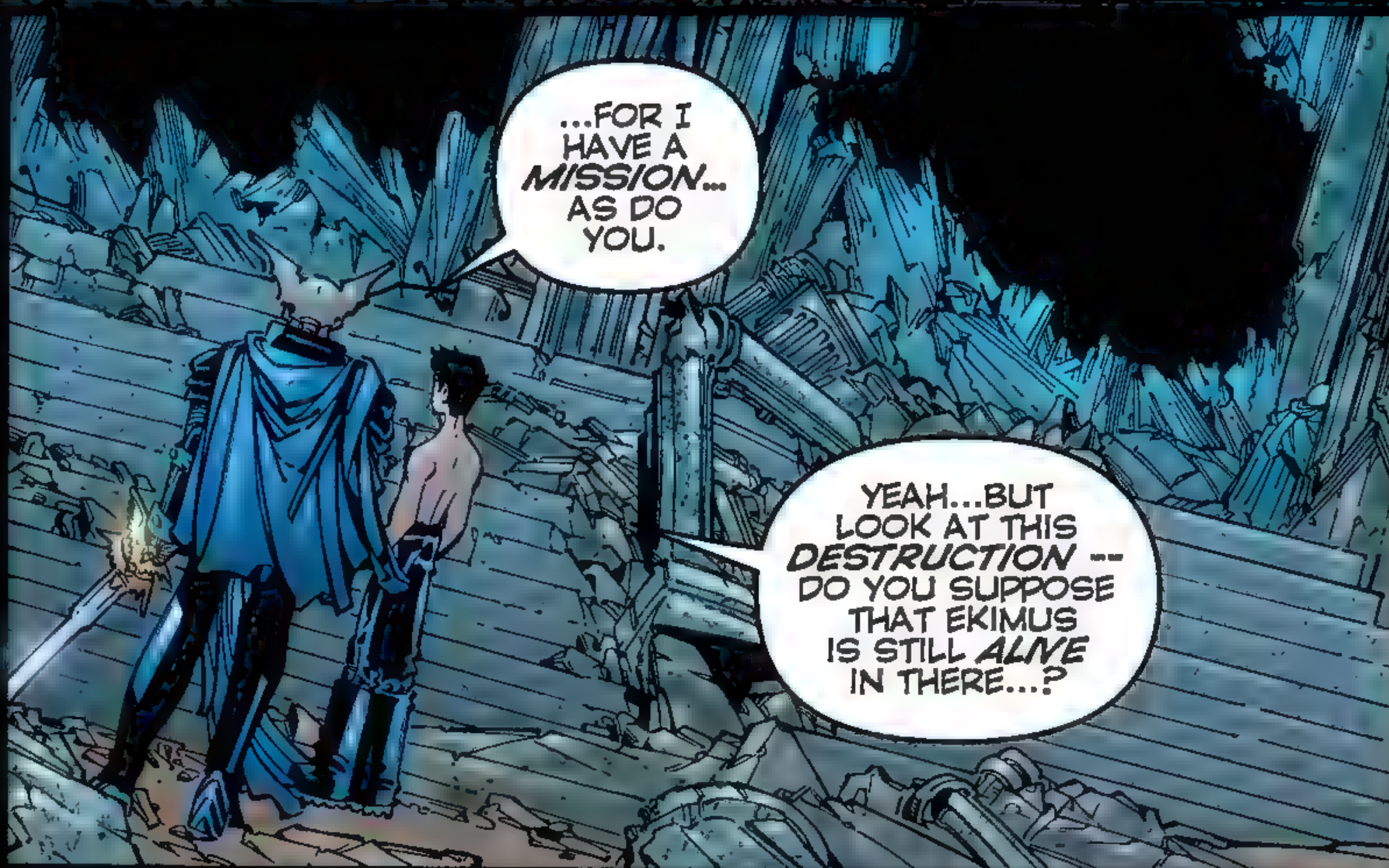
YAAAAYY!

DAD...



YOUR FATHER
IS A *GREAT MAN*,
ALEX, IT IS GOOD
THAT YOU COULD
SEE HIM...

...WOULD
THAT I COULD
SEE *MY FAMILY*,
BUT NOW IS NOT
THE TIME...



...FOR I
HAVE A
MISSION...
AS DO
YOU.

YEAH...BUT
LOOK AT THIS
DESTRUCTION --
DO YOU SUPPOSE
THAT EKIMUS
IS STILL *ALIVE*
IN THERE...?



I CAN ONLY
HOPE AND *PRAY*
THAT HE IS...WE
NEED HIM.

IF HE'LL
HELP --

--EKIMUS?!
ARE YOU
HERE?!

I *AM*.
AND READY
TO FIGHT TO
THE *DEATH*
FOR THE
CAUSE...

...TO *DESTROY*
THE *DRAGONS*
AND RESTORE
CREATION TO THE HANDS
OF *HUMANKIND* --
AS THE *CREATOR*
INTENDED IT FROM
THE DAWN!





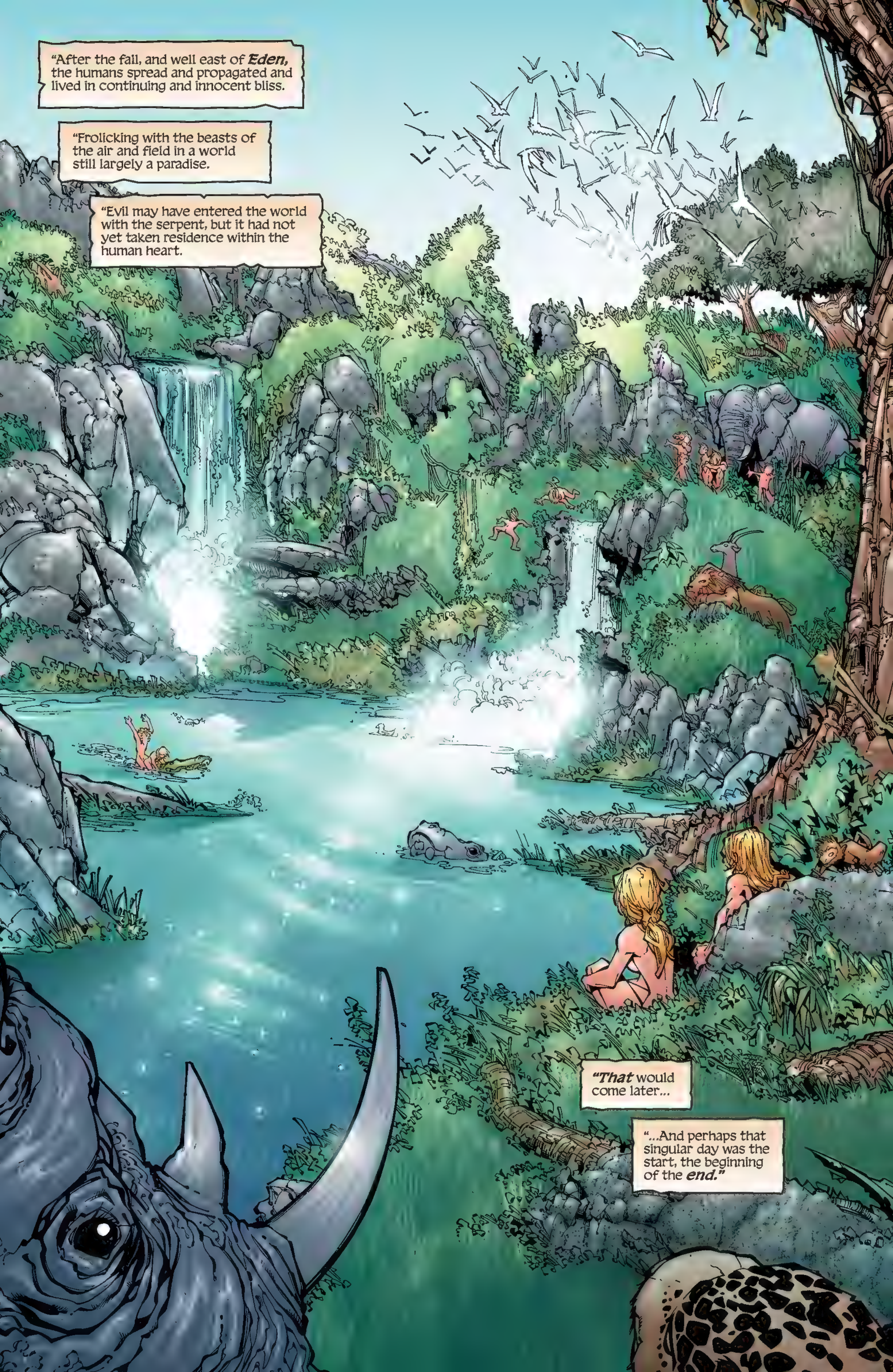
CHAPTER TWENTY

THE FIRE THIS TIME

"After the fall, and well east of *Eden*, the humans spread and propagated and lived in continuing and innocent bliss.

"Frolicking with the beasts of the air and field in a world still largely a paradise.

"Evil may have entered the world with the serpent, but it had not yet taken residence within the human heart.



"*That* would come later...

"...And perhaps that singular day was the start, the beginning of the *end*."

"They were creatures of peace and wonder. They moved through the lush world without guile or fear. They had no enemies..."

"...That they knew of."

"Rightly, God had placed creation in their soft, caring hands--which, it is said, *enraged* other, earlier beings."

"Though I can say with certainty that we *Angels* did not resent them. We gladly served as guardians of these simple folk--for we loved them."

"They did not even know how to avoid the rain. In fact, they *reveled* in it as they did every aspect of creation."

"How could they have anticipated the *horror* that waited for them?"

"How could *we* have not...?"

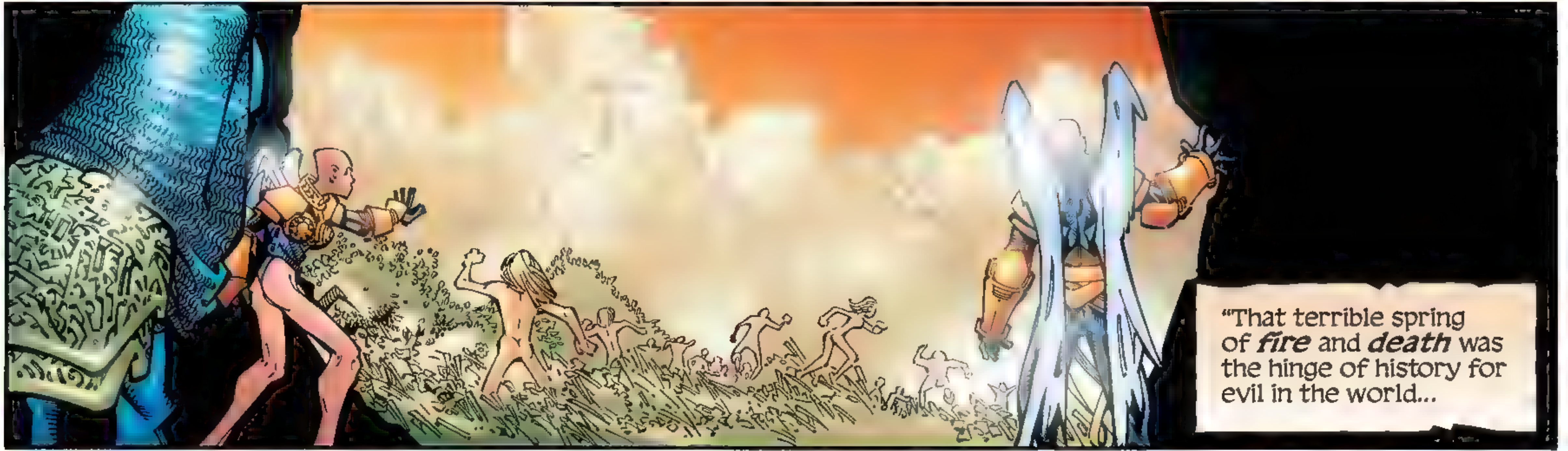
"Perhaps it was our great love for them that kept us so blind."

"We existed to *shepherd* them, and we did that too well. We protected them--and *ourselves*--from *reality*."

"When it finally came, none of us were prepared."



"The *Dragons* were the *most* resentful of the humans' dominion. In their anger they struck back.



"That terrible spring of *fire* and *death* was the hinge of history for evil in the world...



"...And very nearly the *end* of human history.

"We failed our charges and our creator. The Dragons, in their spite, were *too much* for us.



"While we struggled to recover, far too many *perished* horribly.



"It was all *our* fault."



"The dragons had *rejected* the authority of *Heaven* after the *war* between the creator and Satan...

"...Our commands, our *pleas*, fell on *deaf* ears.



"*Iriel*, the senior of our number, was incinerated that day as well...



"...And his heavenly weapon fell to earth...



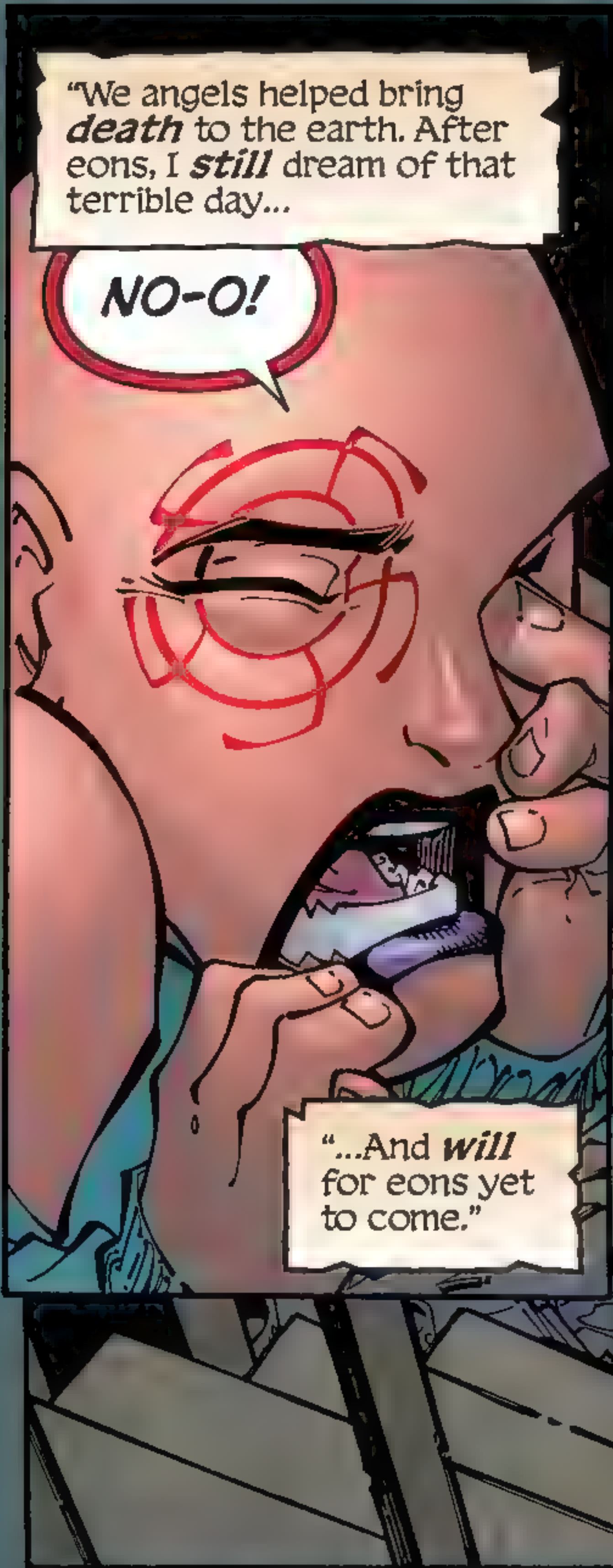
"...And ultimately into human hands.



"Our blades are celestially forged--*no* earthly substance can stand against them--not *stone*, not *steel*...



"...And certainly not *flesh*."



"We angels helped bring *death* to the earth. After eons, I *still* dream of that terrible day..."

NO-O!

"...And *will* for eons yet to come."



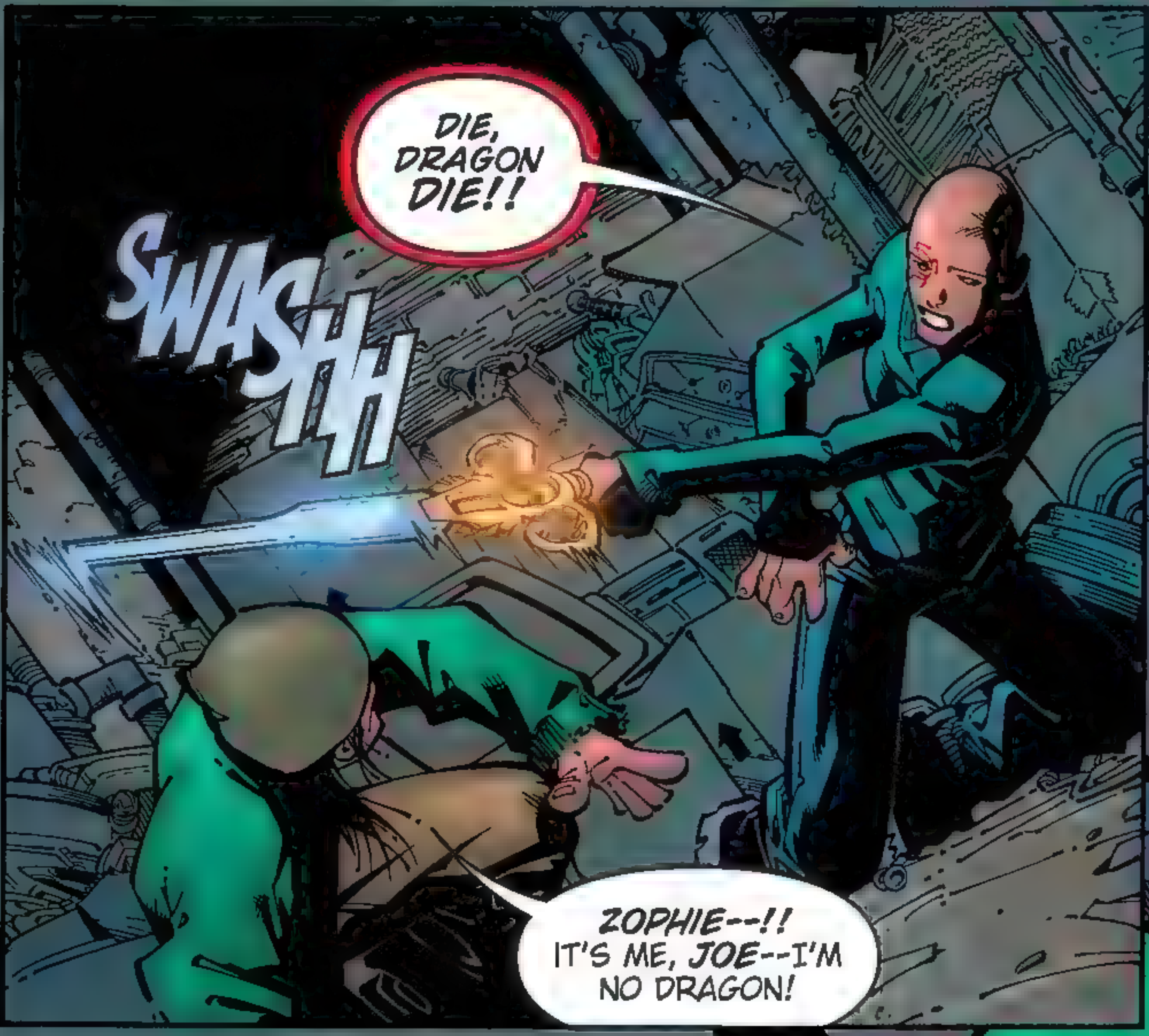
ZOPHIE?!
WHAT'S THE
MATTER, BAD
DREAMS?

...Kill the
serpents!
Eliminate
them for
good!



KILL
THEM
ALL!

BEFORE
THEY KILL
US!



DIE,
DRAGON
DIE!!

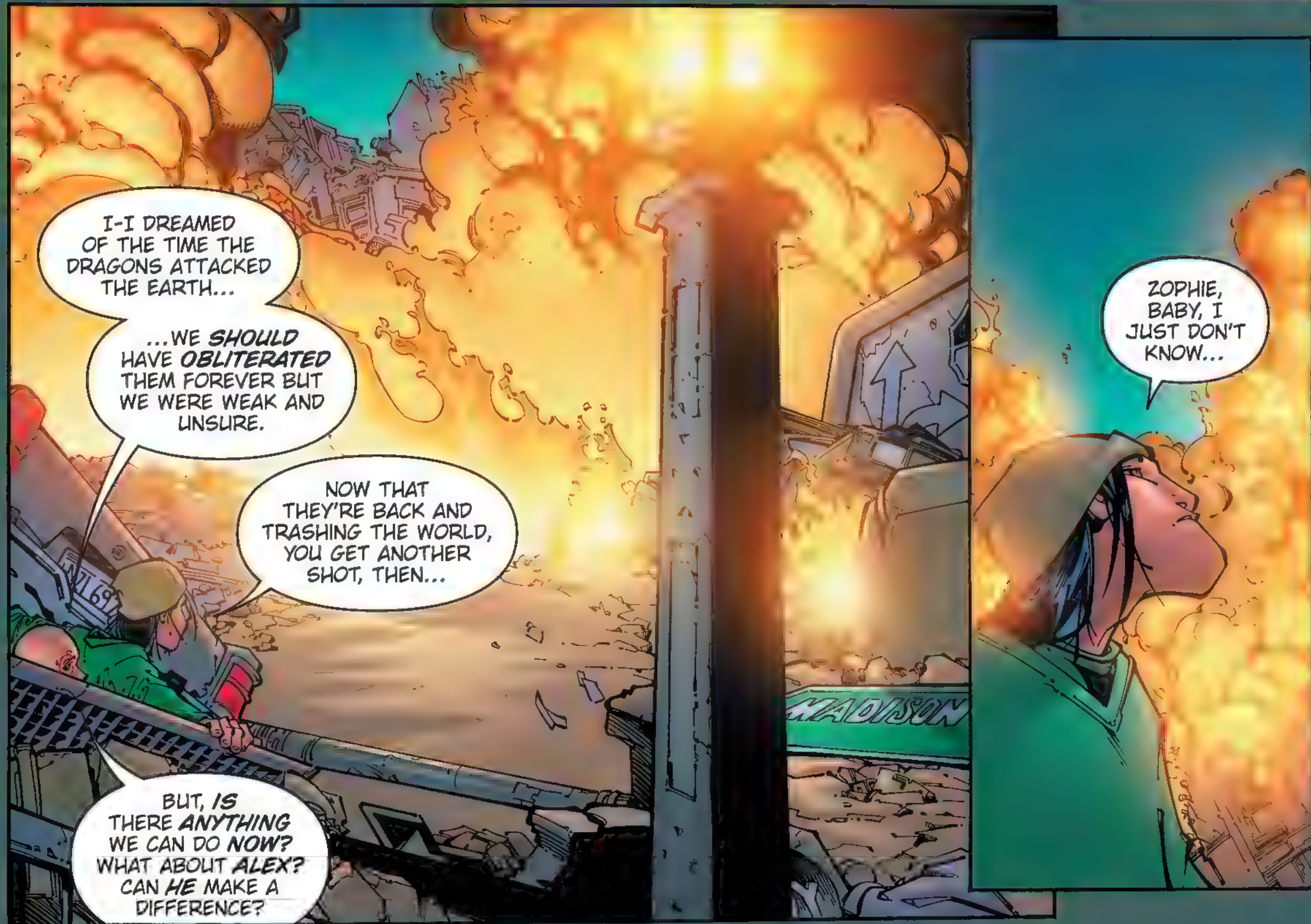
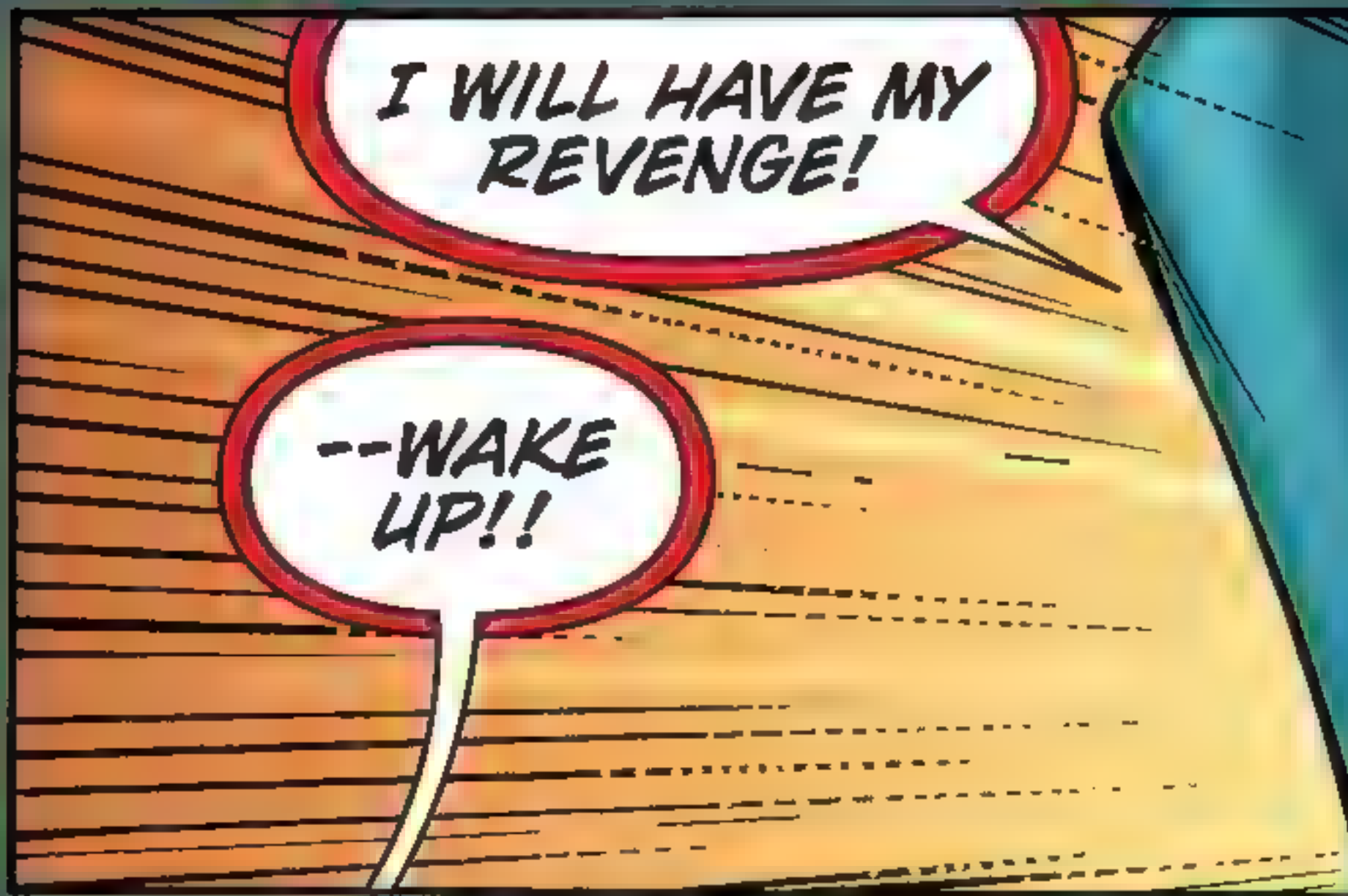
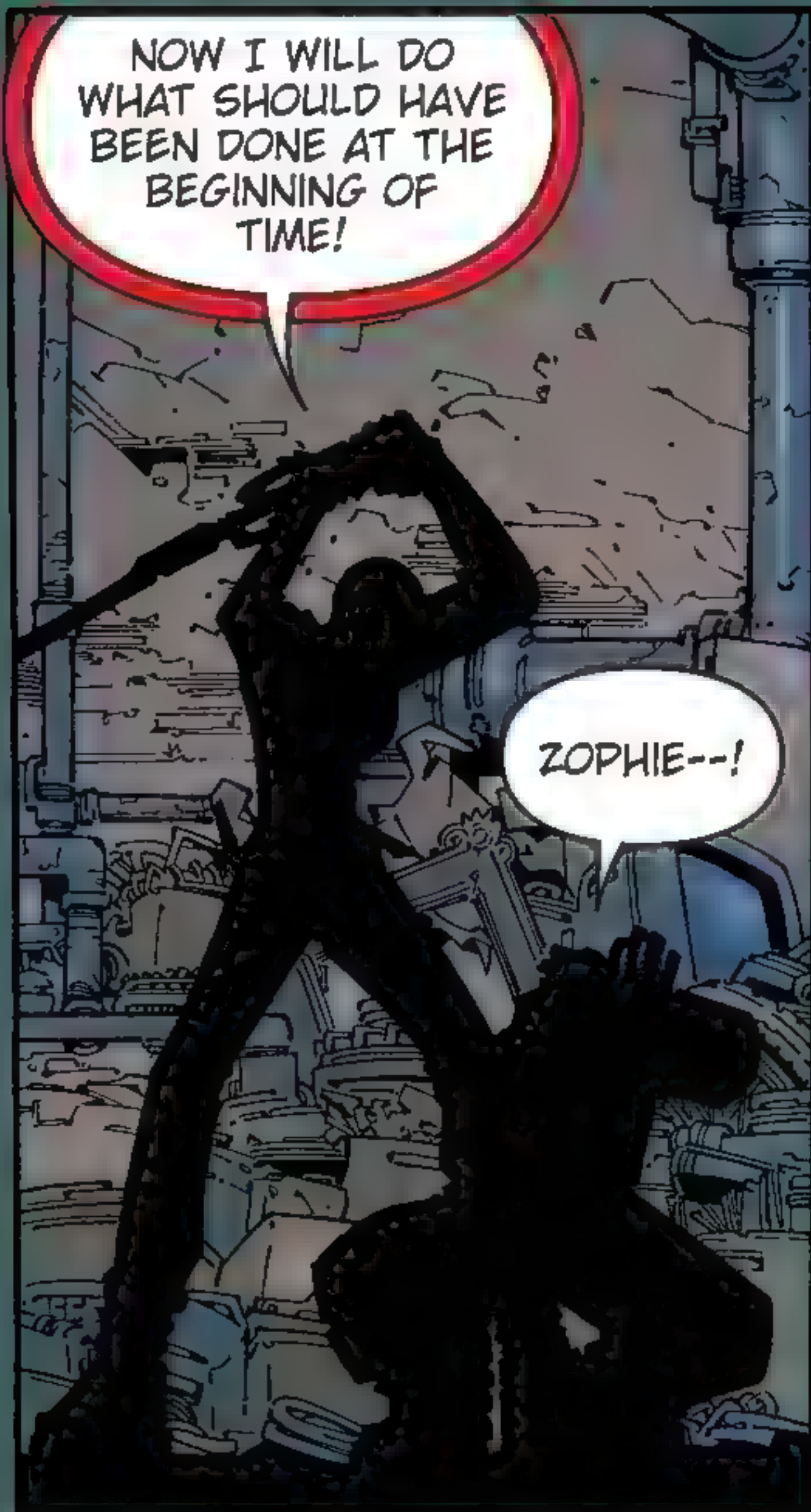
SWASH

ZOPHIE---!!
IT'S ME, JOE--I'M
NO DRAGON!



I'M A
FRIEN--
--UFFF!

THWOK



HE IS CALLED **SAPHA**. THE FIRST OF ALL THE CHALKYDIRI-- THE **DRAGONS**--AND THE GREATEST. HE IS **ONE** SINGLE BEING, PHYSICALLY, BUT IS CONNECTED BY A GROUP MIND TO **ALL** HIS KIND.

HE IS **TRULY** LEGION.

SO HE'S INDESTRUCTIBLE. THAT'S NOT VERY ENCOURAGING.



SAPHA WAS BANISHED FROM HEAVEN AND CUT OFF FROM THE OTHERS AT THE DAWN OF CREATION... HIS THIRST FOR REVENGE WILL TAKE MUCH BLOOD TO QUENCH.

NOW IS THE TIME HE HAS CHOSEN TO RECLAIM THE DRAGON'S POWER OVER THE EARTHLY REALM--

--TO **REBEL** AGAINST GOD, AS LUCIFER DID SO LONG AGO.

YOU SAY IT CAN BE **KILLED**. HOW?

I... DO NOT KNOW. BUT I **WILL** FIND OUT. BECAUSE OF **ME**, SAPHA ROAMS THE EARTH AGAIN--

I INTEND TO CORRECT THAT MISTAKE-- WITH **FINALITY!**

THE **DRAGONS** WILL **DIE**.



THEN *SAPHA* DIES FIRST! WE HAVE TO ATTACK HIM IN HIS LAIR! IT IS A *SUICIDE RUN*. BUT WE HAVE TO TRY! WHAT OTHER CHOICE IS THERE?

EKIMUS, ISN'T THERE *SOMETHING* YOU CAN DO...?

PERHAPS, ALEX ELDER-- THERE IS AN ARTIFACT...

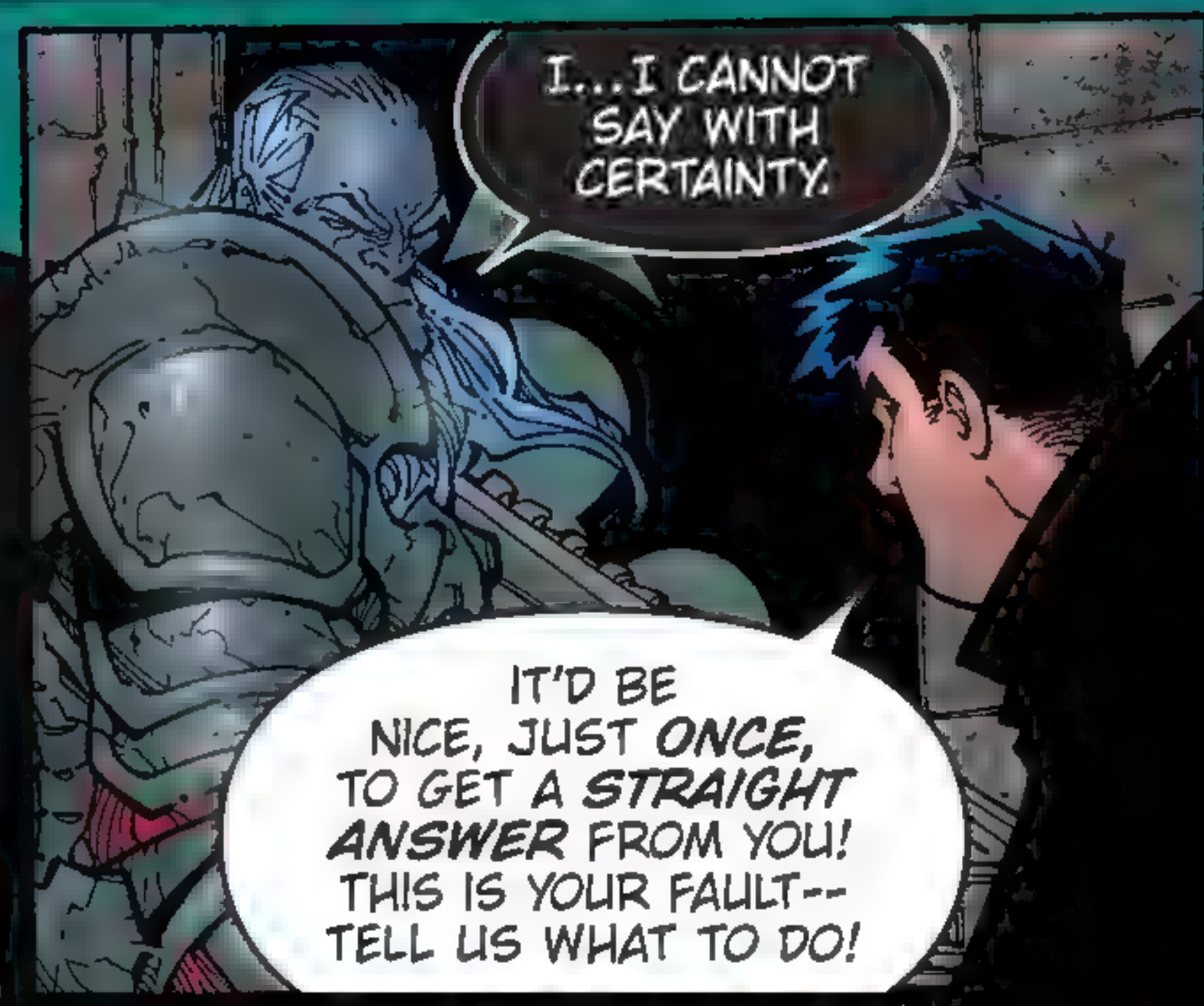


...IT MIGHT HELP, INDEED.



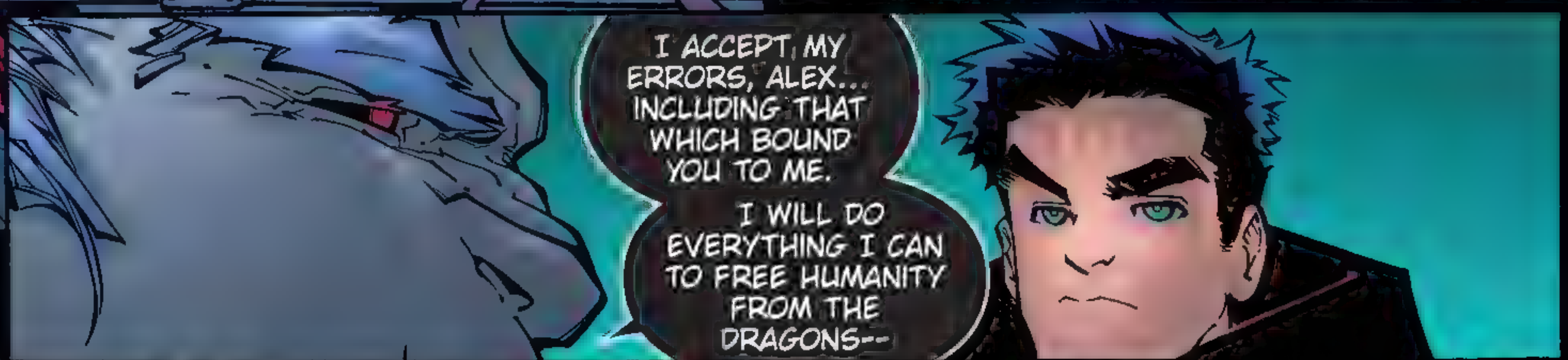
IT IS SAID TO BE THE CLAVICLE OF SOLOMON...

I'VE HEARD OF IT. SUPPOSED TO BE THE ONLY THING THAT CAN KILL THE DEVIL. WILL IT WORK ON *DRAGONS* TOO?



I...I CANNOT SAY WITH CERTAINTY.

IT'D BE NICE, JUST *ONCE*, TO GET A *STRAIGHT ANSWER* FROM YOU! THIS IS YOUR FAULT-- TELL US WHAT TO DO!



I ACCEPT, MY ERRORS, ALEX... INCLUDING THAT WHICH BOUND YOU TO ME.

I WILL DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO FREE HUMANITY FROM THE DRAGONS--

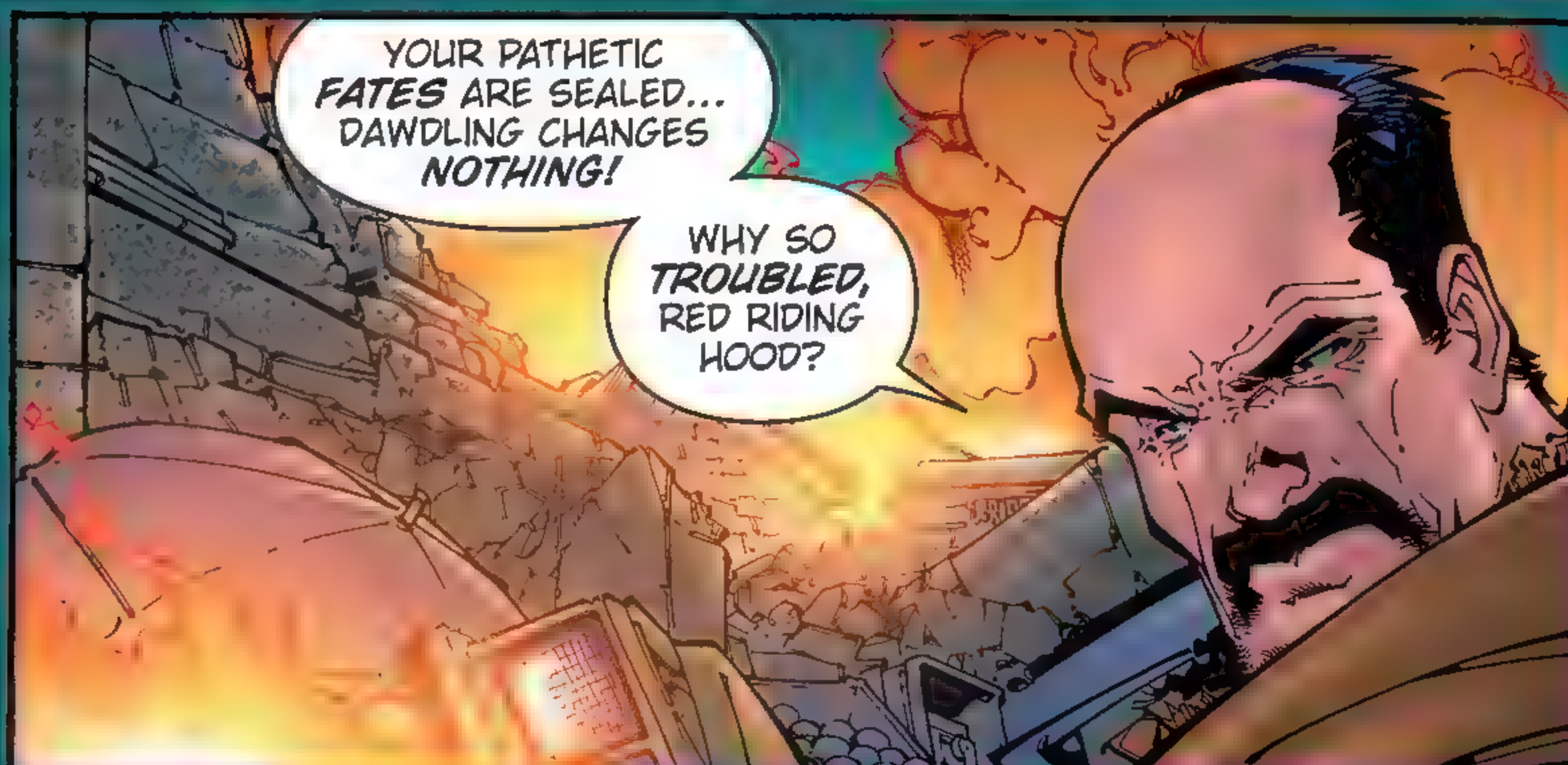


WITH OR
WITHOUT
YOUR HELP.



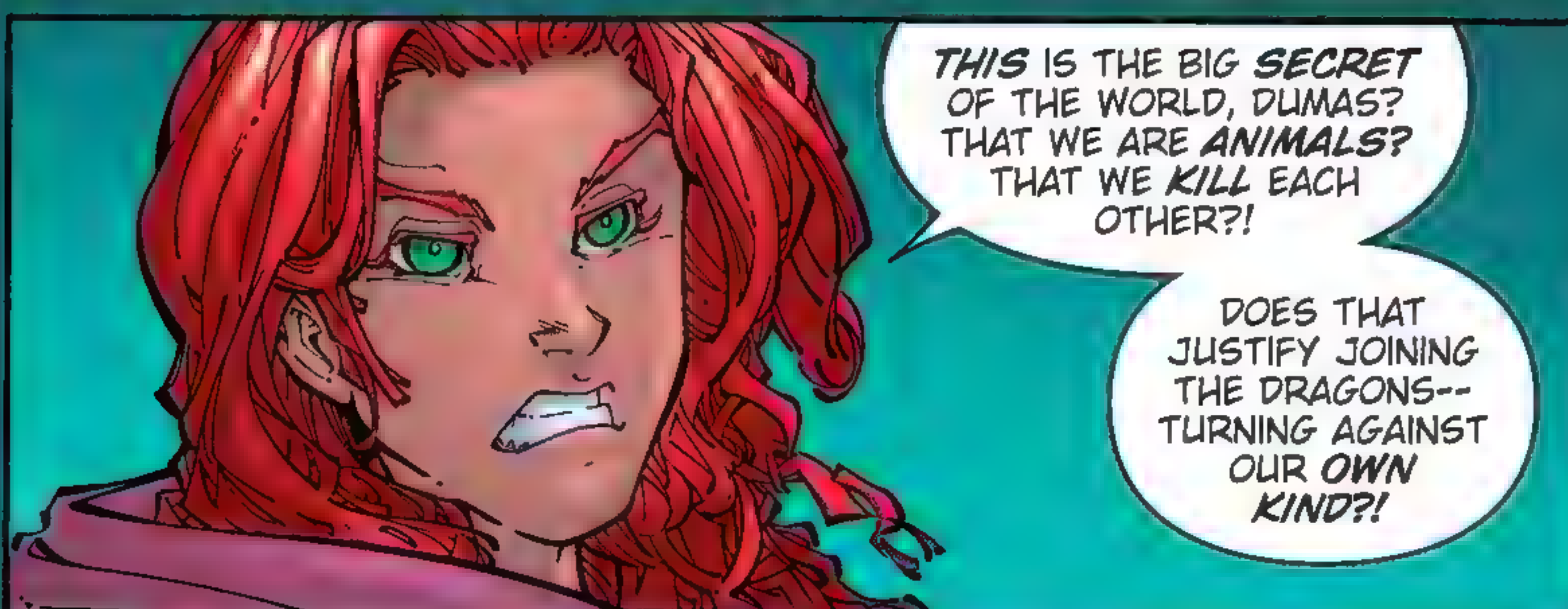
ELSEWHERE IN
NEW YORK...

MOVE IT,
SHEEP! THE
DRAGON MASTERS
WANT YOU **PEN**NED
FOR FUTURE
USE!



YOUR PATHETIC
FATES ARE SEALED...
DAWDLING CHANGES
NOTHING!

WHY SO
TROUBLED,
RED RIDING
HOOD?



THIS IS THE BIG **SECRET**
OF THE WORLD, DUMAS?
THAT WE ARE **ANIMALS**?
THAT WE **KILL** EACH
OTHER?!

DOES THAT
JUSTIFY JOINING
THE DRAGONS--
TURNING AGAINST
OUR OWN
KIND?!

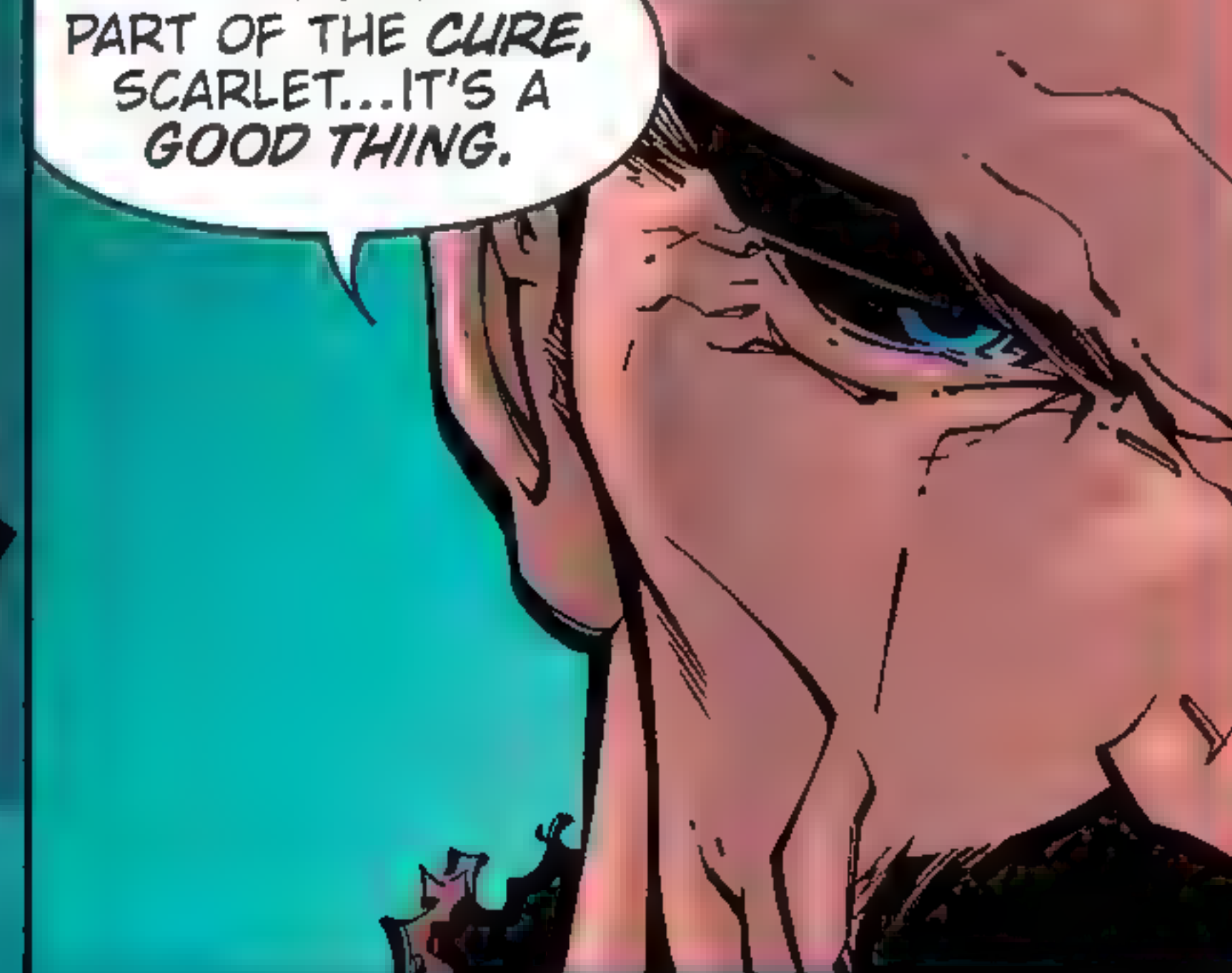
WE ARE NOT KIN TO THE **HUMANS**,
SCARLET. WE ARE **WOLFEN**. AND NO,
THE SECRET IS THAT THE EARTH
IS A **LIVING** THING--



THINKING,
GROWING...
FEELING!

LIKE ANY OTHER ORGANISM, WHEN
IT IS **SICK**, IT MUST BE **HEALED**.
HUMANITY IS A **CANCER** THAT MUST
BE **CUT OUT** BEFORE IT CHOKES
MORE **VALUABLE** LIFE FROM
THE PLANET.

WE ARE
PART OF THE **CURE**,
SCARLET...IT'S A
GOOD THING.



THIS IS *NATURE'S* WAY... IF WE ACT AGAINST NATURE, WE WILL BE DESTROYED AS WELL. ACCEPT IT, SCARLET.

WH-WHAT?

GRAB HER QUICKLY, BEFORE DUMAS NOTICES!

LET'S GO, *SHEEP*--ACROSS THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE TO BE... *PROCESSED*!

Humph-muh-mumph?!

MAESE HENRI?! HOW?!

THAT DOES NOT MATTER. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE HAVE FOUND YOU, MY DEAR...

...WE FEARED WE HAD *LOST* YOU AT DULAC CASTLE.

I FEAR THAT YOU *HAVE*, MASTER... DUMAS HAS...

I KNOW, SCARLET. I SENSE THE *DARKNESS* WITHIN YOU... BUT THERE IS STILL HOPE, I *PROMISE* YOU.

SACRE...
HOW I PRAY
THAT MIGHT BE
TRUE...

...BUT I AM
CONFUSED, MASTER--
WHY ARE THE RED
HOOD, THE ORDER OF
THE DRAGON AND THE
TEMPLAR KNIGHTS
TOGETHER?

IN DIRE TIMES AS THESE,
THAT COMMON CAUSE MAKES
US **ALL** CHAMPIONS OF
THE EARTH.

OUR
ORDERS MAY
SHARE AN *ENMITY*,
SCARLET. BUT WE
ALL FIGHT IN GOD'S
NAME.

AND OUR
FIRST STRIKE
IS AGAINST THE
**TRAITOR
DUMAS!**

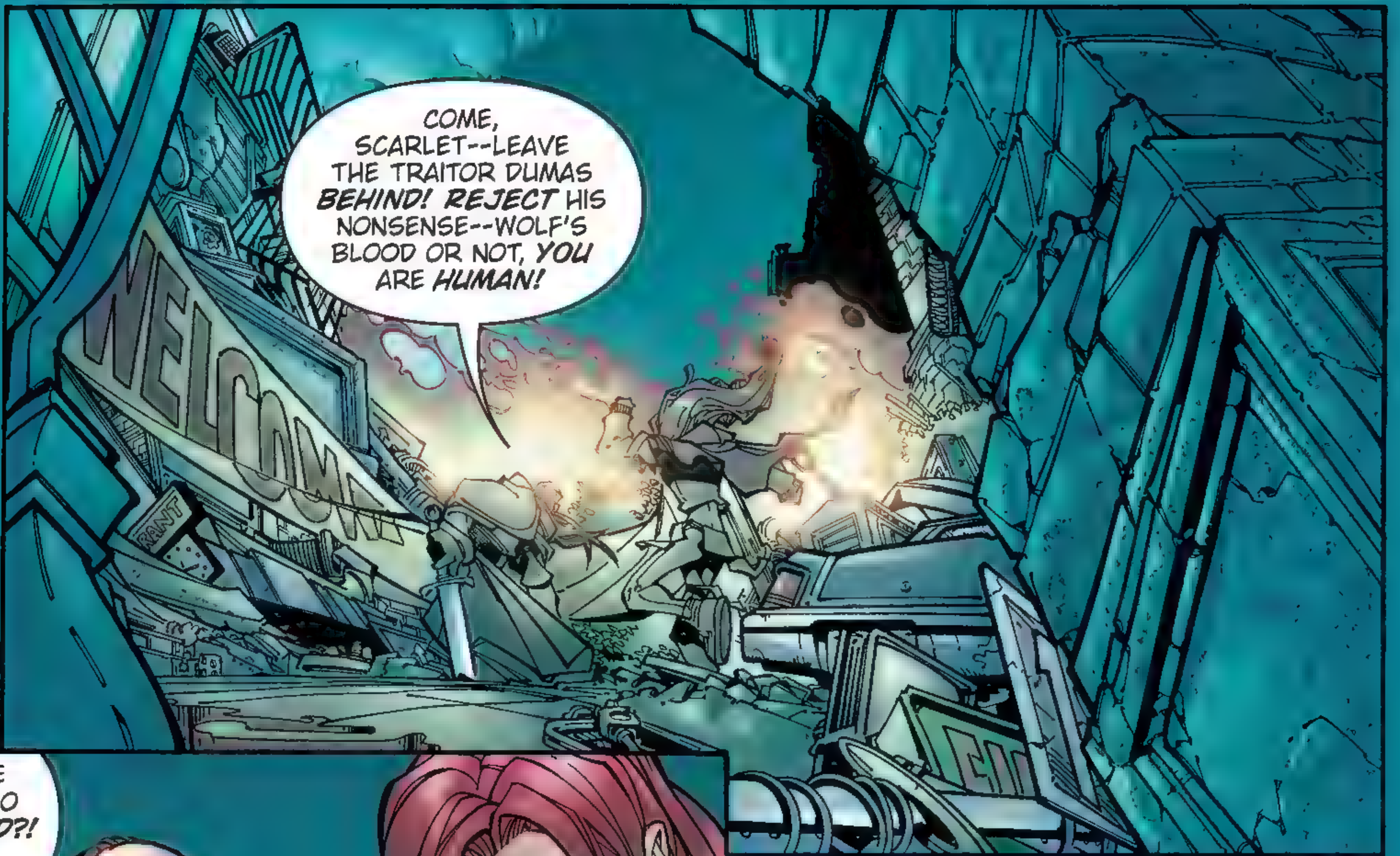
TEMPLARS?!
RED HOODS?!
SCARLET, WE
ARE--

SCARLET!?!

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE
WITH SCARLET?! AND YOU
ATTACK MY WOLVES--MY
CHILDREN?! WHO
ORDERS THIS?!

QUICKLY!
WE MUST
TAKE OUR
LEAVE.

AH... IT IS
YOU... HENRI...
BROTHER.



COME,
SCARLET--LEAVE
THE TRAITOR DUMAS
**BEHIND! REJECT HIS
NONSENSE--WOLF'S
BLOOD OR NOT, YOU
ARE HUMAN!**

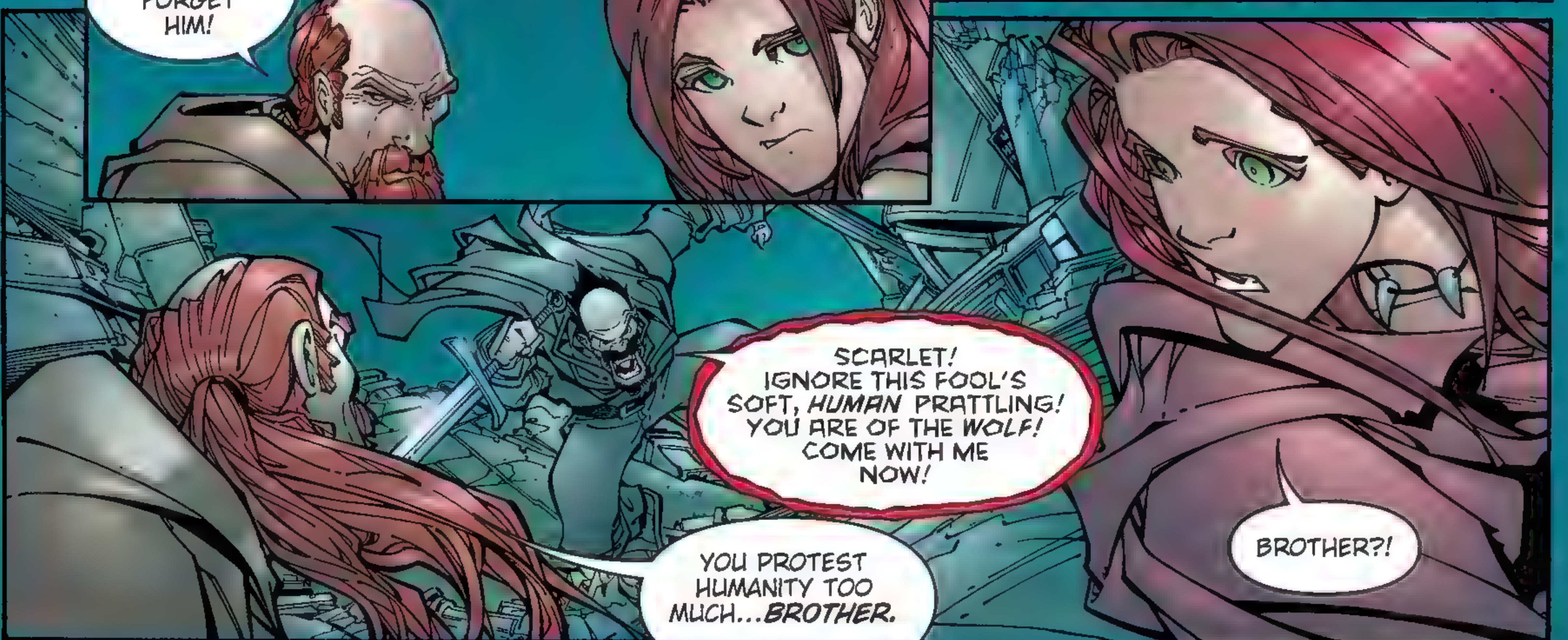
WHY ELSE
ARE YOU SO
CONFLICTED?!
FORGET
HIM!



SCARLET!
IGNORE THIS FOOL'S
SOFT, **HUMAN** PRATTLING!
YOU ARE OF THE **WOLF!**
COME WITH ME
NOW!

YOU PROTEST
HUMANITY TOO
MUCH...**BROTHER.**

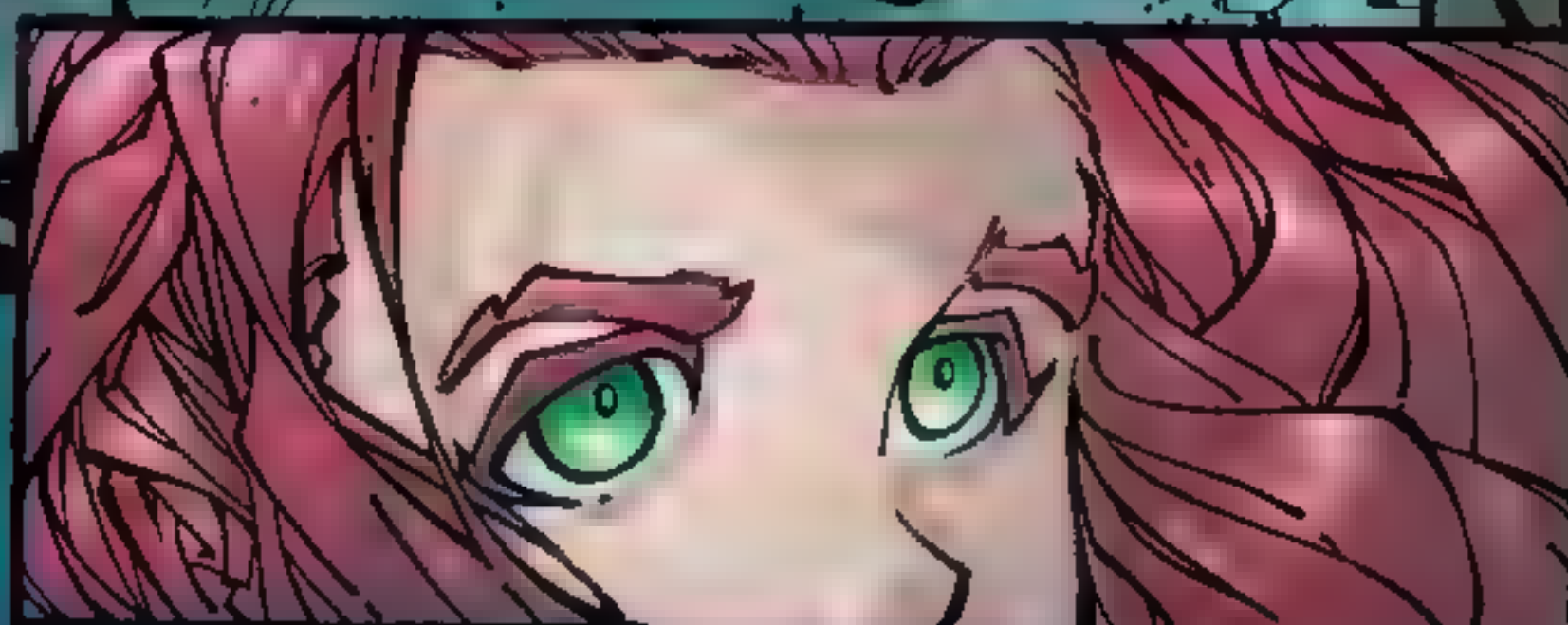
BROTHER?!



COMMON PARENTAGE
IS IRRELEVANT, HENRI
DUMAS! I AM
THE **WOLF!**

WE ARE
ONE, SCARLET
THINBAULT. COME
WITH ME NOW
AND SURVIVE THE
PURGE!

TAKE
MY SWORD,
KILL THIS
WEAK FOOL
AND FOLLOW
ME.



NO! I WILL FOLLOW YOU NO
LONGER--YOU HAVE LIED TO
ME, **ABUSED** ME, FOR THE
LAST TIME! I STAND
WITH **HUMANITY!**

UNN--!

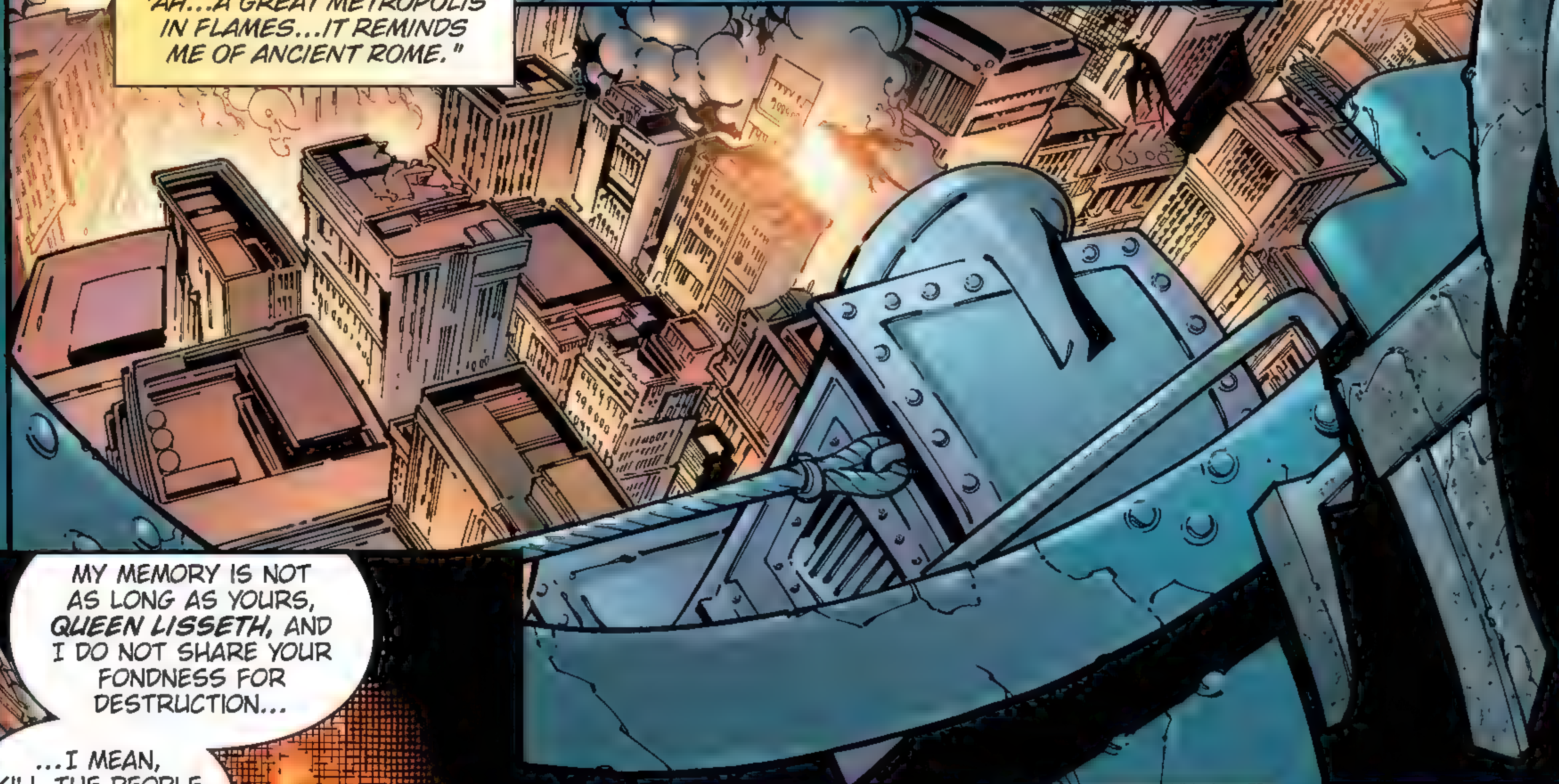
WHUD





YOU HAVE CHOSEN *NOBLY*, DEAR SCARLET. NOT GET AWAY...
I WILL DEAL WITH MY *LITTLE BROTHER*!

"AH...A GREAT METROPOLIS
IN FLAMES...IT REMINDS
ME OF ANCIENT ROME."



MY MEMORY IS NOT
AS LONG AS YOURS,
QUEEN LISSETH, AND
I DO NOT SHARE YOUR
FONDNESS FOR
DESTRUCTION...

...I MEAN,
KILL THE PEOPLE
IF YOU MUST, BUT
LEAVE ME THE
BEAUTY OF
THE CITY.

VICTOR,
YOU ARE SUCH A
SENTIMENTALIST...



...BUT SPARE
ME...ONCE THIS
WAR IS OVER, YOU
SHALL BE A
KING.

DO
WHATEVER
YOU WISH WITH
YOUR DOMAIN!

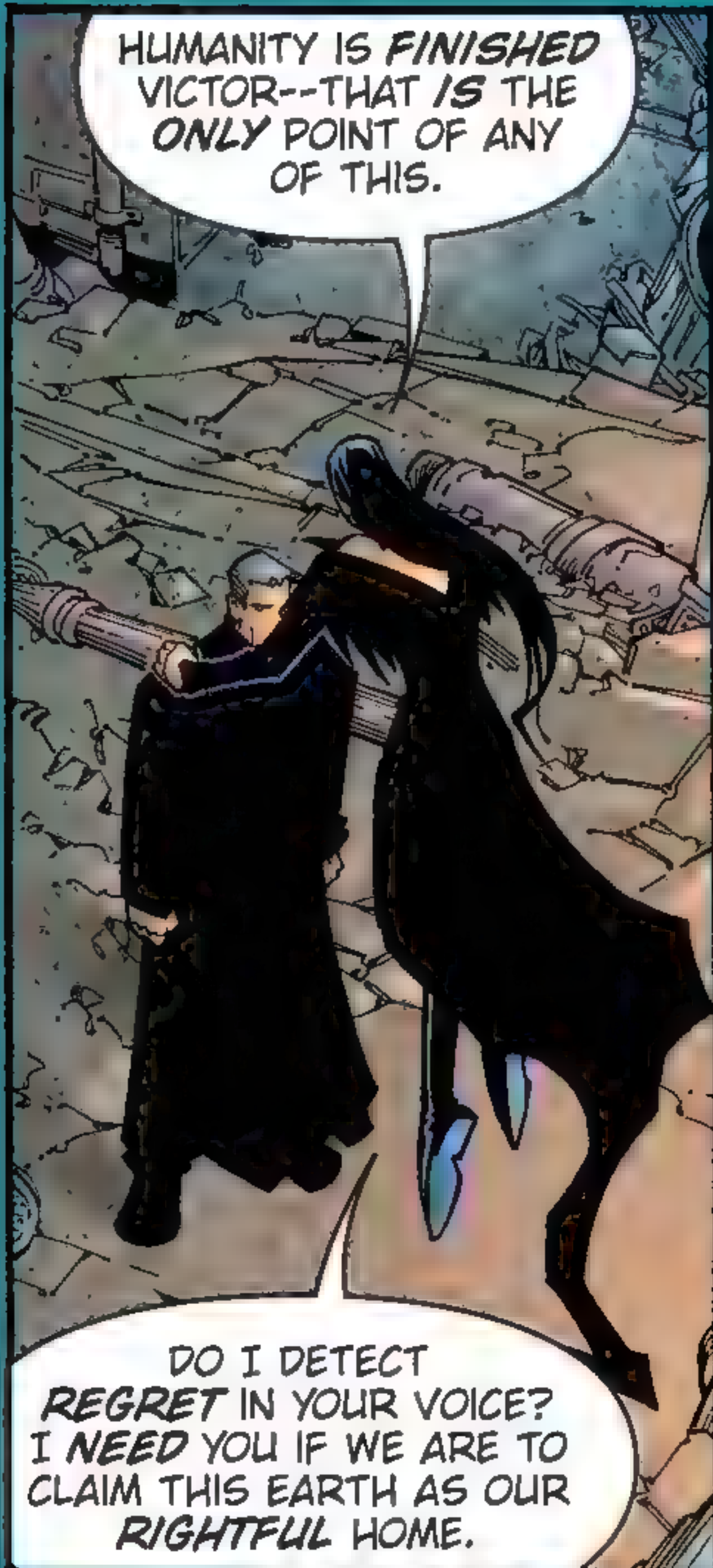


IF YOU DON'T REIN IN
YOUR SCALY ALLIES, I
WILL BE THE KING OF
NOTHING...



...AND THE LEADER OF SUBJECTS WHO WILL **DESPISE** ME. I COULD HAVE BEEN **PRESIDENT**, BUT NOW I WILL BE SEEN ONLY AS A **TRAITOR**.

STOP BEING SUCH A **POLITICIAN**, VICTOR. YOU CAN'T POLL THE PEOPLE'S OPINION ONCE THEY ARE **EXTINCT**.



HUMANITY IS **FINISHED** VICTOR--THAT *IS* THE **ONLY** POINT OF ANY OF THIS.

DO I DETECT **REGRET** IN YOUR VOICE? I **NEED** YOU IF WE ARE TO CLAIM THIS EARTH AS OUR **RIGHTFUL** HOME.



AND YOU KNOW THAT I **LOVE** YOU--

MMMMMM.



THE DRAGONS JEALOUSY COVET THE PLANET, AND WERE WILLING TO ALLY THEMSELVES TO MY CAUSE. I NEED THEM TO TIP THE FINAL BALANCE AGAINST THE HUMANS...

...BUT YOU KNOW THAT I WILL **NEVER** SHARE THE SPOILS WITH THOSE OVERGROWN NEWTS. IN THE END, THE DRAGONS ARE DESTINED TO BE **SCREWED** ONE FINAL TIME.



CALL IT **POETIC IRONY**...



BUT UNDERSTAND THIS ONE THING, VICTOR VAN FLEET:

CROSS ME, AND YOU WILL BE WORSE OFF BY FAR THAN EITHER DRAGON OR HUMAN. THE WORLD IS **MINE** AND **MINE ALONE**. DO NOT GET IN MY WAY.



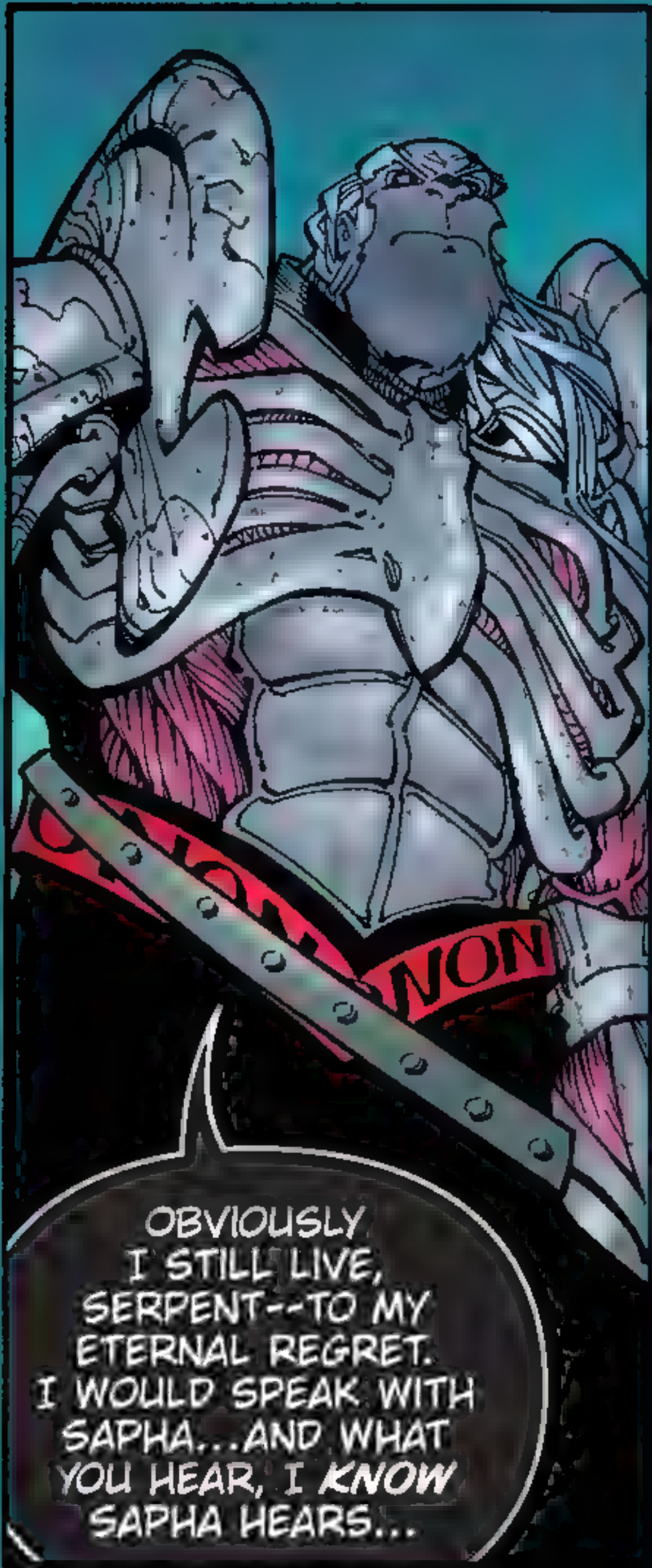
WE'RE AT
GROUND ZERO
FOR DRAGONS
FOLKS--BE
ALERT!

YES...
WE CANNOT
SURRENDER WHAT
LITTLE ADVANTAGE
WE HAVE...

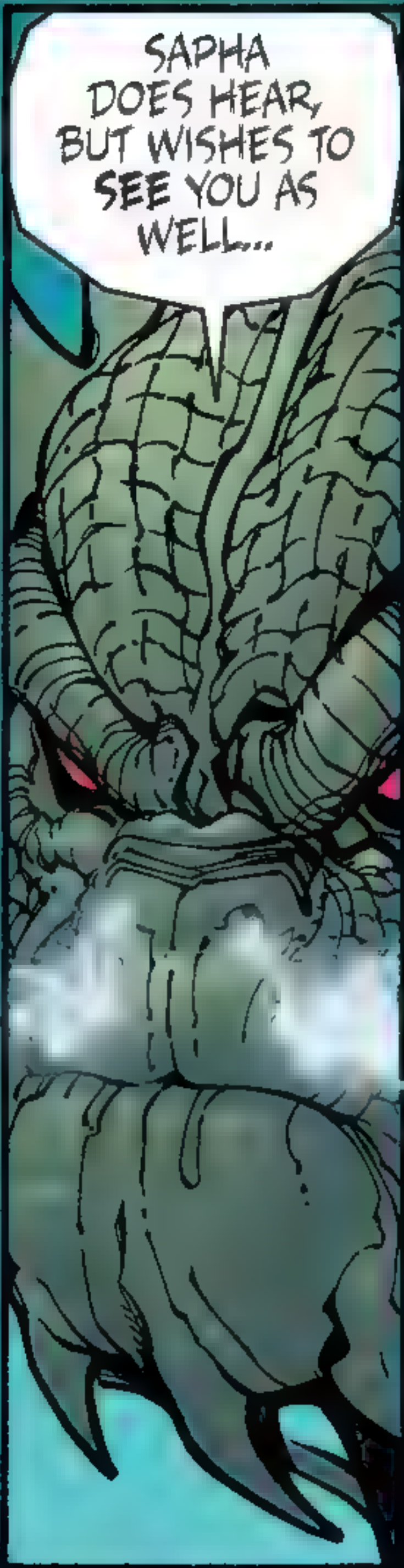


TOO LATE,
FOOLS--YOU ARE
DISCOVERED!

OH! IT IS THE GREAT EKIMUS! WE
HAD THOUGHT YOU DEAD BACK ON
THE ISLAND OF TARTARUS...
LORD SAPHA WILL BE
DISAPPOINTED.



OBVIOUSLY
I STILL LIVE,
SERPENT--TO MY
ETERNAL REGRET.
I WOULD SPEAK WITH
SAPHA...AND WHAT
YOU HEAR, I KNOW
SAPHA HEARS...



SAPHA
DOES HEAR,
BUT WISHES TO
SEE YOU AS
WELL...



...SEE
YOU
DEAD!



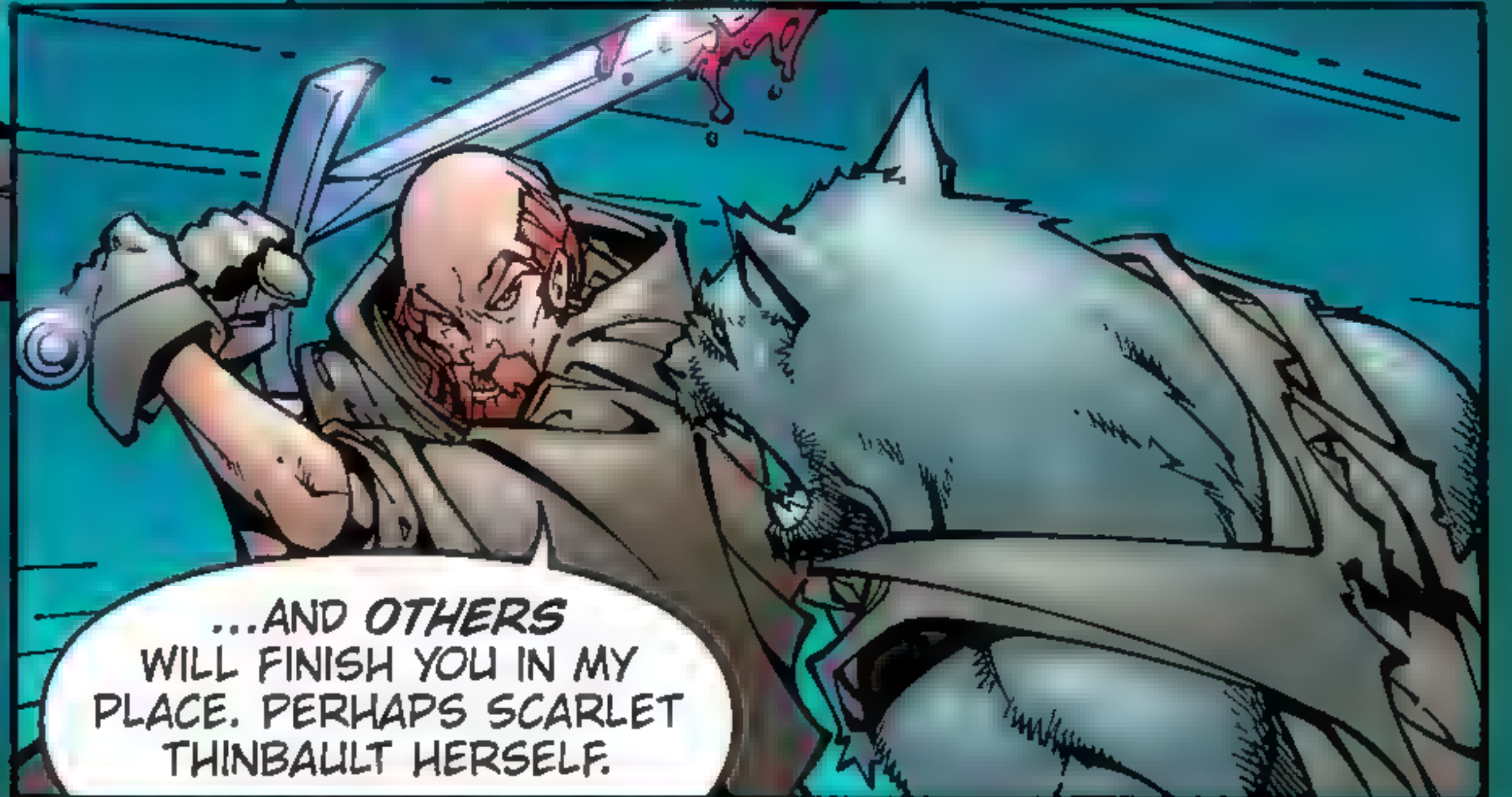


YOU ARE STILL SHARP, OLD MAN--BUT NOT SHARP ENOUGH!

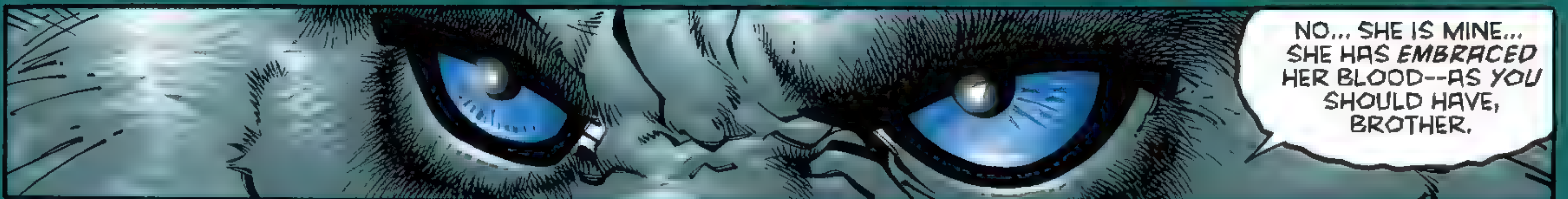


AND YOU *ALREADY* TIRE. YOU CANNOT OUTLAST ME!

THEN I WILL FIGHT YOU TO MY LAST BREATH...



...AND OTHERS WILL FINISH YOU IN MY PLACE. PERHAPS SCARLET THINBAULT HERSELF.



NO... SHE IS MINE... SHE HAS *EMBRACED* HER BLOOD--AS YOU SHOULD HAVE, BROTHER.

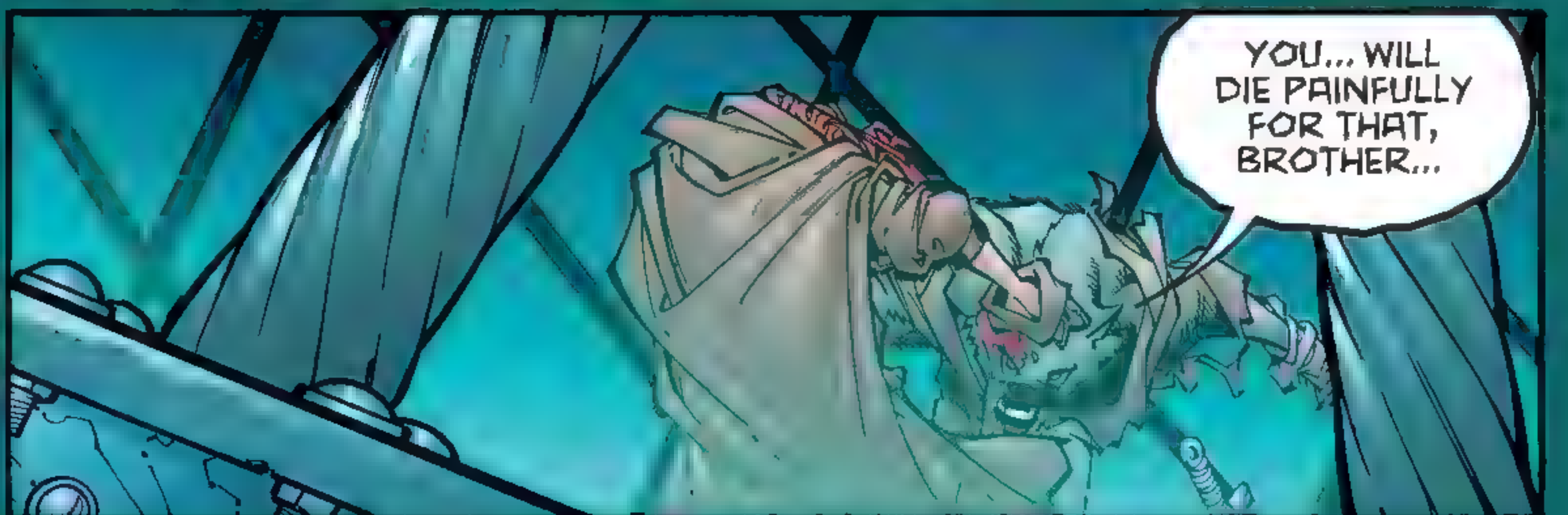


YOURS IS A *HERETIC'S* HEART, BROTHER. I REJECT THAT BLASPHEMY!

AND THE GIRL HAS REJECTED IT AS WELL!



ARGH



YOU... WILL DIE PAINFULLY FOR THAT, BROTHER...



CHUMPH

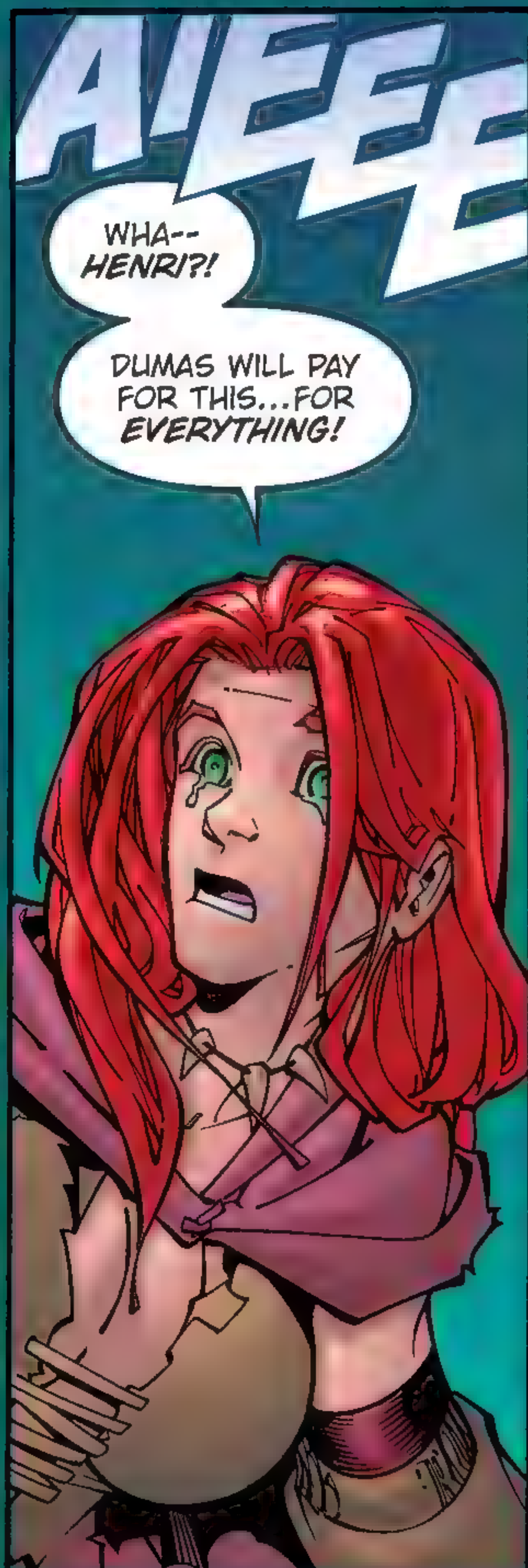
UHHH...



DO NOT DIE TOO QUICKLY, THOUGH, HENRI--THERE ARE IMPORTANT *FINAL* LESSONS I DESIRE TO TEACH YOU...!



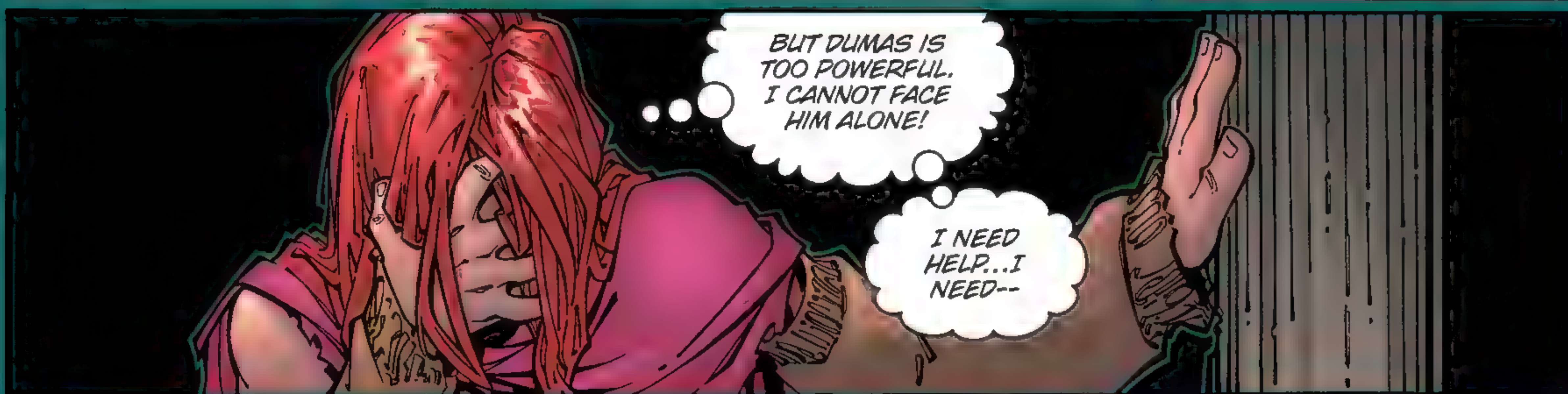
I AM SO LOST...



AIEEE

WHA--
HENRI?!

DUMAS WILL PAY
FOR THIS...FOR
EVERYTHING!



BUT DUMAS IS
TOO POWERFUL.
I CANNOT FACE
HIM ALONE!

I NEED
HELP...I
NEED--



--NEED...?!

REEE-AAGGH!!



ALEX--!?!





YOU
OKAY, SAINT
JORG--?!

UNNNHHH...
I... THINK SO...
THANK YOU,
JOSEPH...

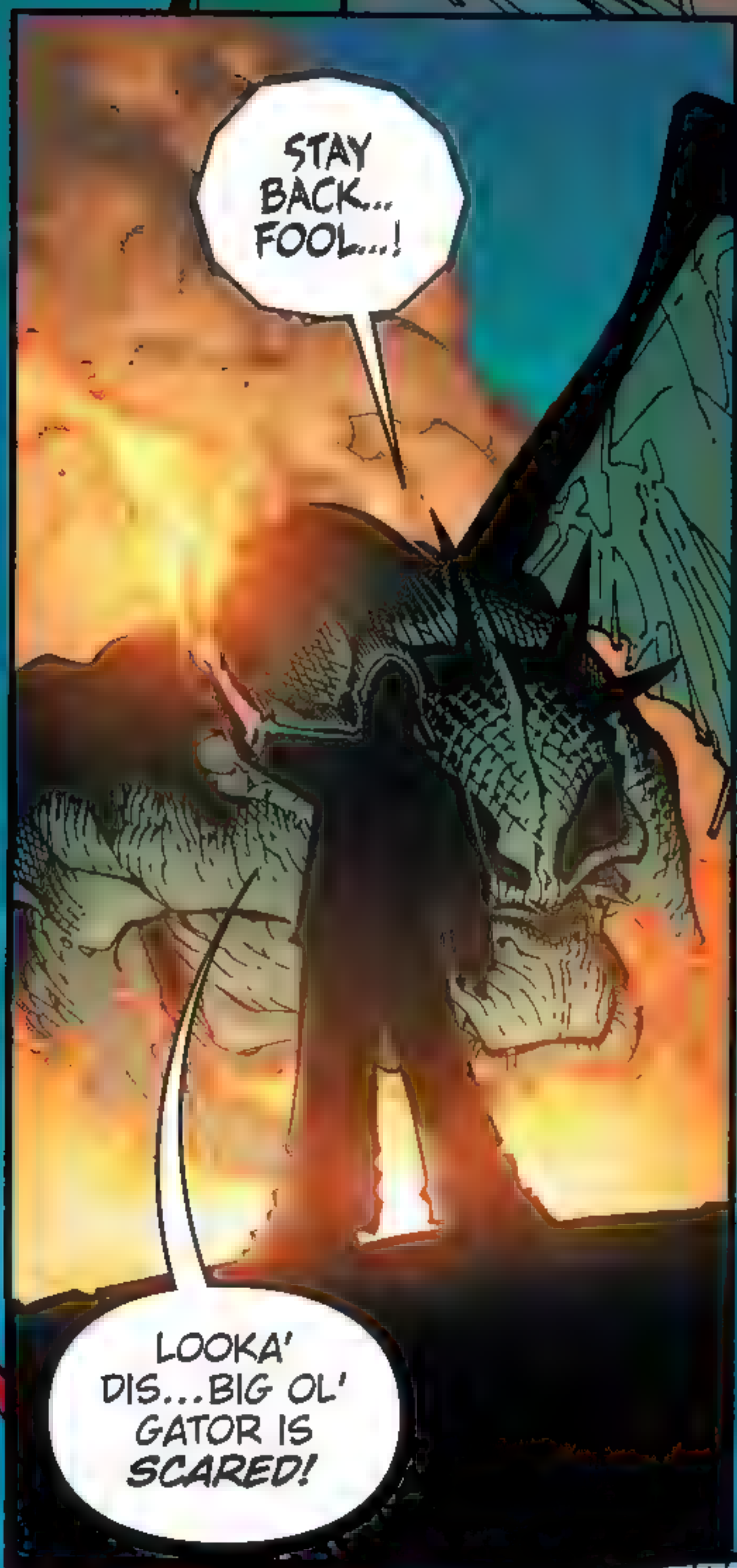
...THIS
IS A RELIC OF
SOLOMON...IT WILL
DEFEAT THE DRAGON--
TAKE IT!

OH YEAH!
MR. DRAGON
IS TOAST!



I AM
ON IT!

HAVE
A CARE, JOSEPH.
THE BEAST WILL NOT
DIE EASILY.



STAY
BACK...
FOOL...!

LOOKA'
DIS...BIG OL'
GATOR IS
SCARED!



HA--!
GOD'S LASER
BEAM!



WHOA-A-A!!

WELL
DONE,
JOE, NOW
FOR...

...THE
COUP DE
GRACE!

SKUUNINGH



ARE...
YOU ALL
RIGHT...?

I AM,
ALEX... ARE YOU
UNHURT AS
WELL?

I'VE BEEN
NOTHING BUT
A BRAT SINCE
DAY ONE.

I FINALLY
SEE HOW *IMPORTANT*
THIS IS. AND HOW HARD
YOU ARE WORKING TO
SAVE AS ALL. I...I'M
REALLY *SORRY*.

...THERE IS NOTHING
TO APOLOGIZE FOR. WE
ARE TOGETHER NOW--
EVERYTHING WILL BE
ALL RIGHT.



JOE! I'M
GLAD YOU'RE
OKAY TOO...AND
A *HERO*. NICE
TIMING, AS
ALWAYS!

THAT'S
ME...EL
JOSE...

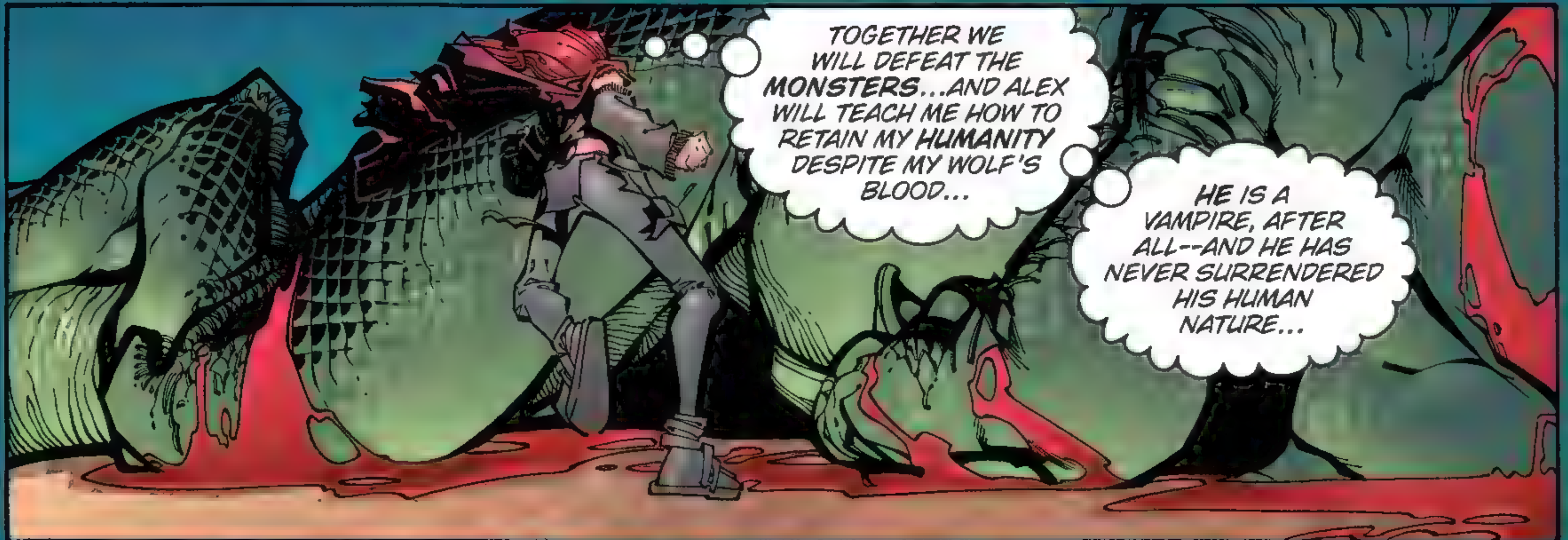


THE
DRAGON-SLAYER!
LET THE GATORS
BEWARE!



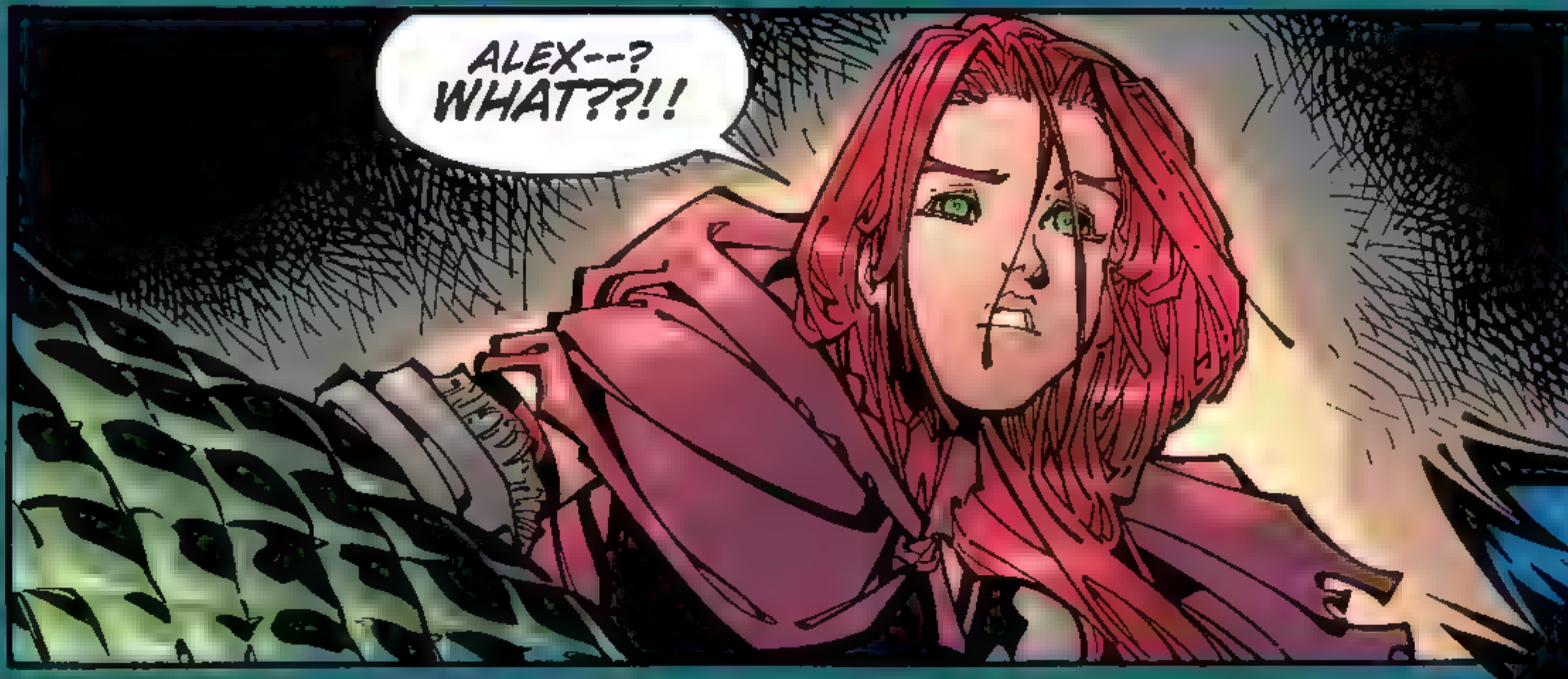
JOE...ALEX...WE
ARE **TOGETHER**
AGAIN!

ALEX--?!!

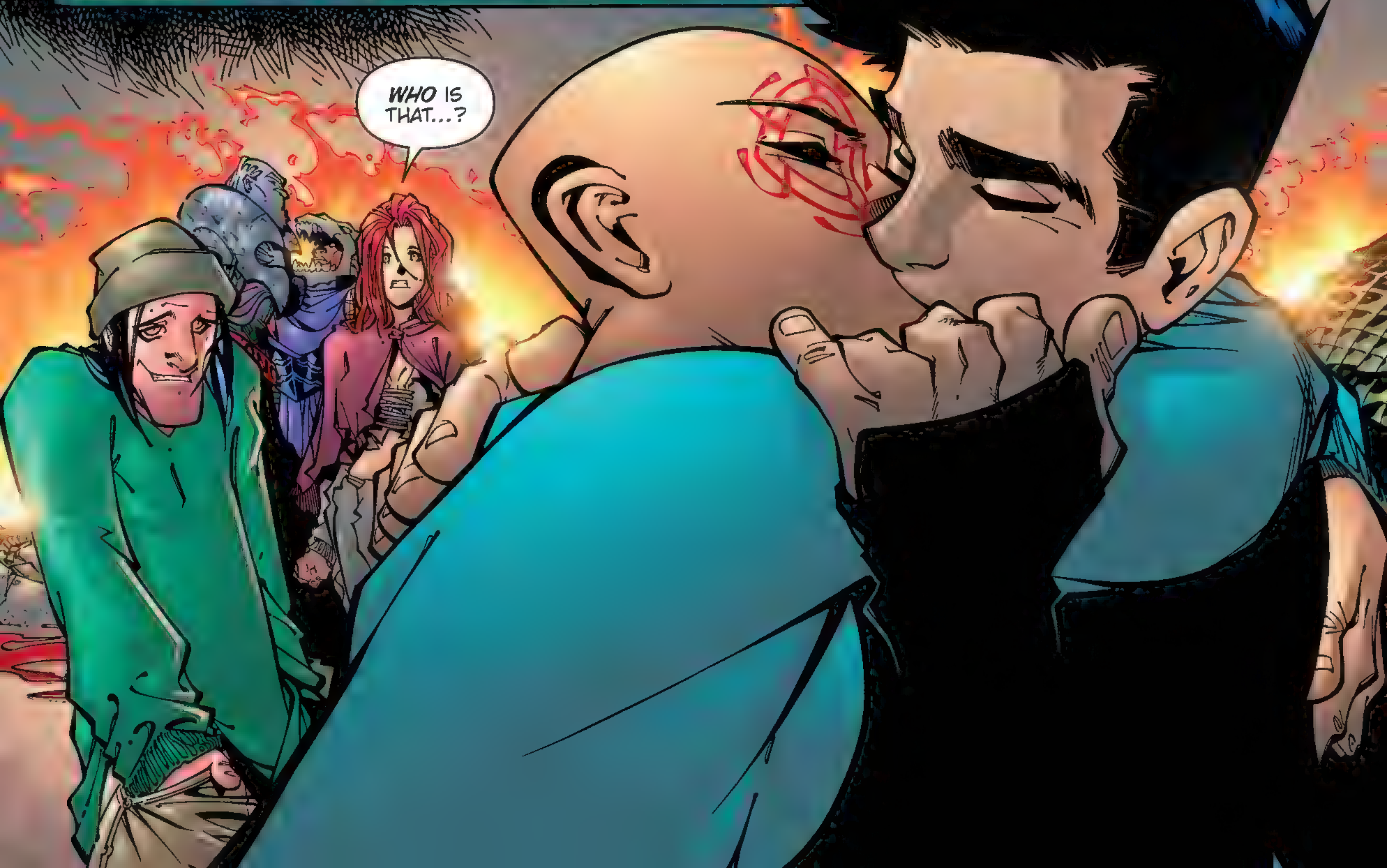


TOGETHER WE
WILL DEFEAT THE
MONSTERS... AND ALEX
WILL TEACH ME HOW TO
RETAIN MY HUMANITY
DESPITE MY WOLF'S
BLOOD...

HE IS A
VAMPIRE, AFTER
ALL--AND HE HAS
NEVER SURRENDERED
HIS HUMAN
NATURE...

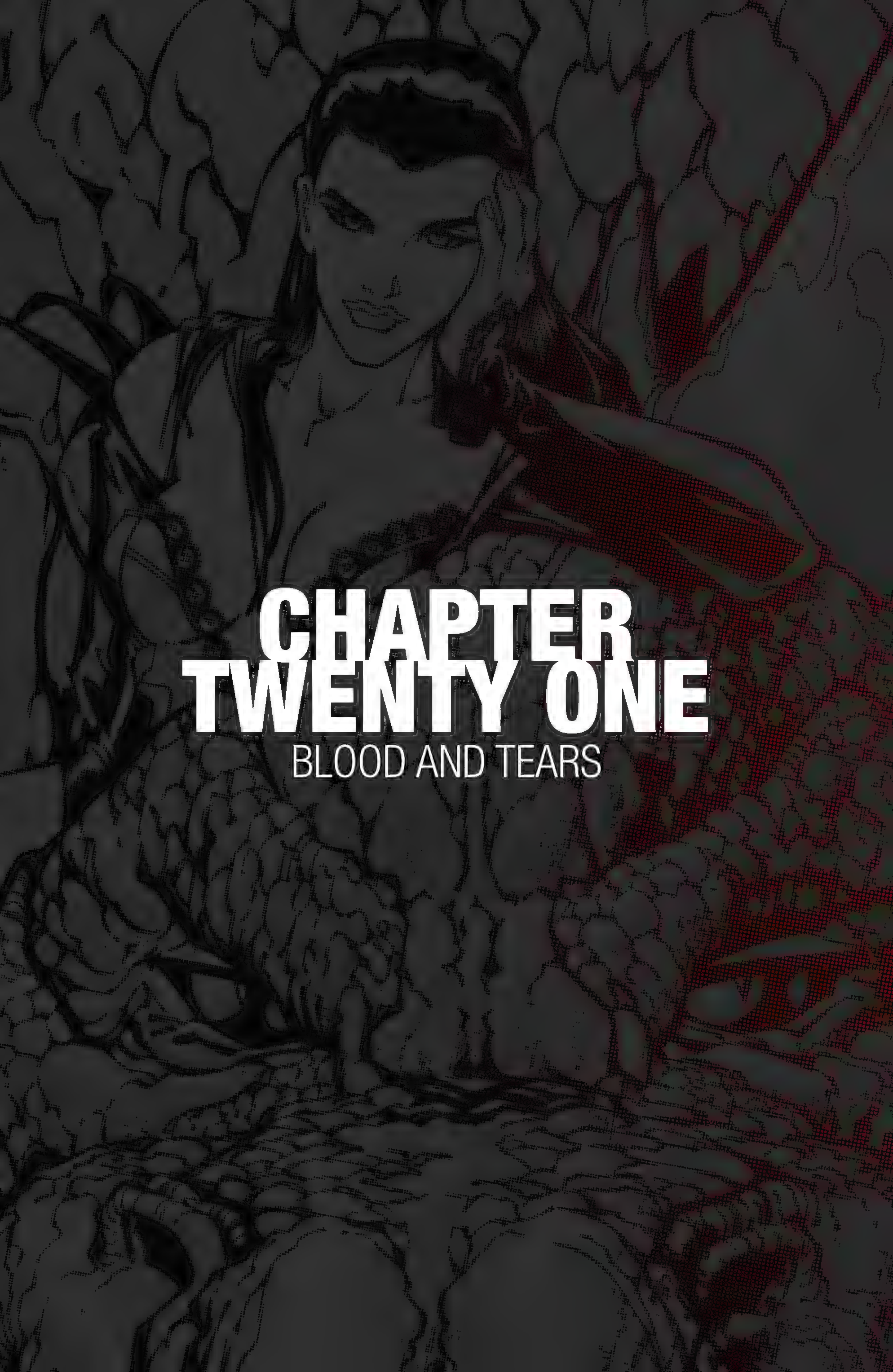


ALEX--?
WHAT??!!



WHO IS
THAT...?





CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

BLOOD AND TEARS

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO A WEREWOLF ATTACKED A YOUNG FRENCH MAID. SHE SURVIVED WHEN A HUNTER ARRIVED TO KILL THE MONSTER.

THE CHILDREN BORN OF THAT ATTACK, WOLF'S BLOOD HAVING TAINTED THEMSELVES AND THEIR PROGENY FOREVER, CREATED A LINEAGE OF WARRIORS DEDICATED TO THE OBLITERATION OF ALL THINGS DEMONIC.

SCARLET THINBAULT IS OF THAT WARRIOR LINEAGE-- SHE WAS A TOP-AGENT OF THE SACRED ORDER OF THE RED HOOD, UNTIL SHE EMBRACED HER ANIMALISTIC HERITAGE...

...AND SHE LAY DOWN WITH WEREWOLVES.

SHE HAD THOUGHT HERSELF SOMETHING OTHER THAN HUMAN. SHE NOW KNOWS THAT WAS A FOOLISH NOTION.

SHE HAS COME TO UNDERSTAND THAT ALL LIFE HERE ON EARTH IS RELATED...CONNECTED... RESPONSIBLE TO ONE ANOTHER.

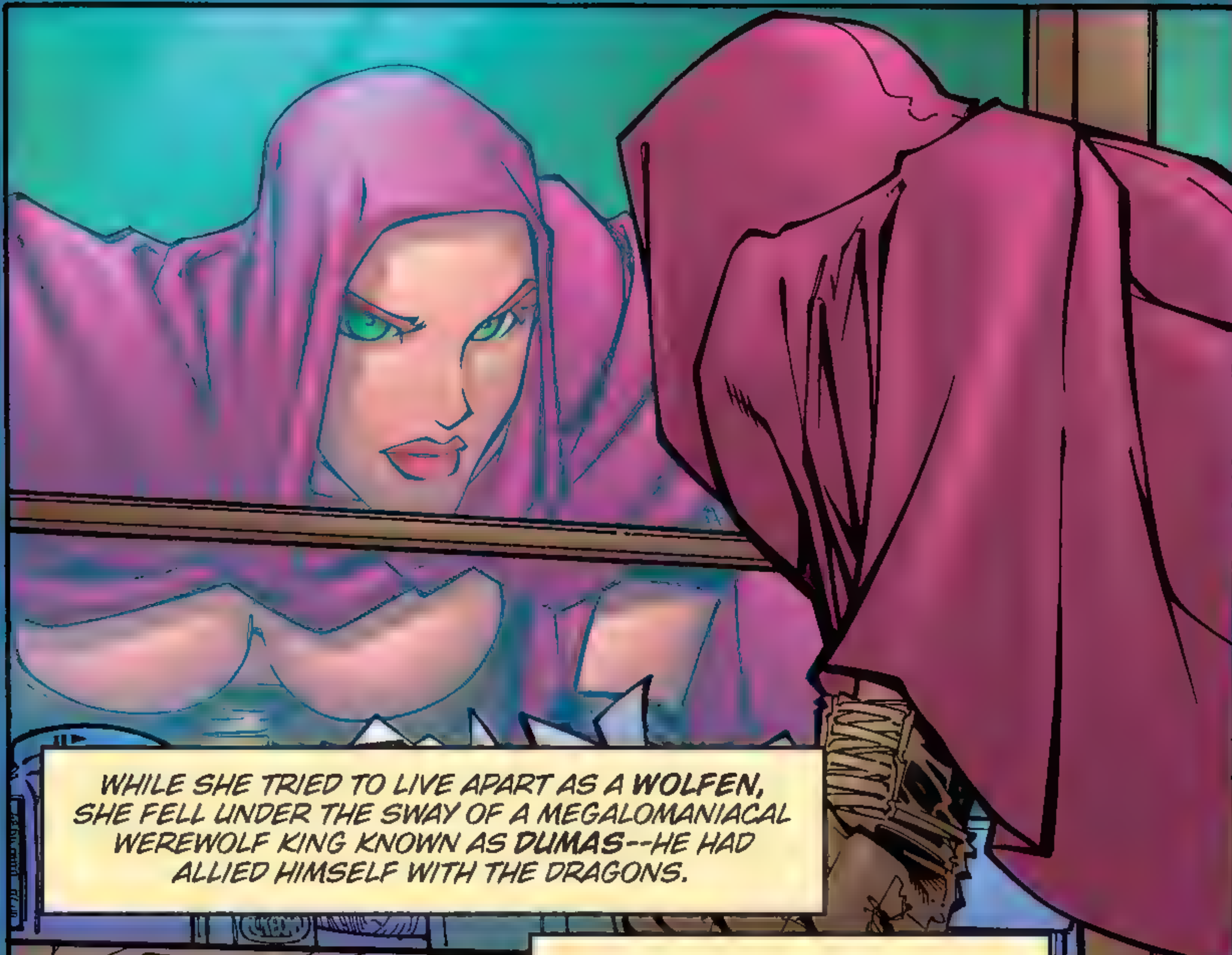
NOW THE WORLD NEEDS TO RECOGNIZE THAT COMMON BOND--IF THEY WILL SURVIVE THE DRAGON'S ONSLAUGHT.

IT IS A WAR TO SAVE A PLANET--AND SCARLET, AS A WARRIOR BORN, SHOULD BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE BATTLE...

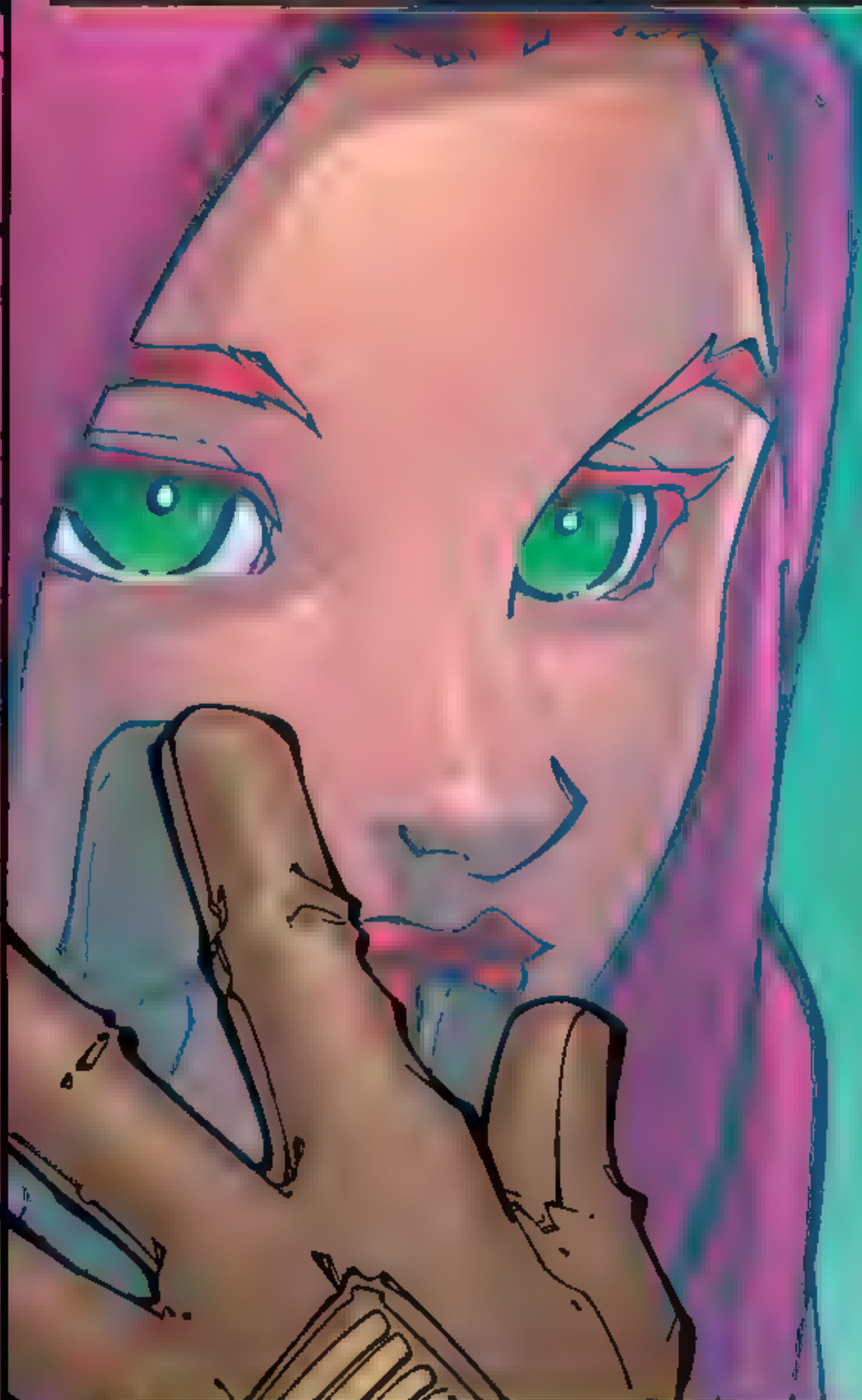
...SHE IS, INSTEAD, CONSUMED WITH THOUGHTS OF...A MORE PERSONAL NATURE.

WHY SHOULD SHE CARE THAT THE BOY VAMPIRE KISSED THE HAIRLESS GIRL?

HE IS A DARKLING--ONCE HE WOULD HAVE BEEN A TARGET, NOT AN OBJECT OF AFFECTION.



...AND NOW, SCARLET WONDERS IF HE UNLEASHED THAT PART OF HER--OR CREATED IT.

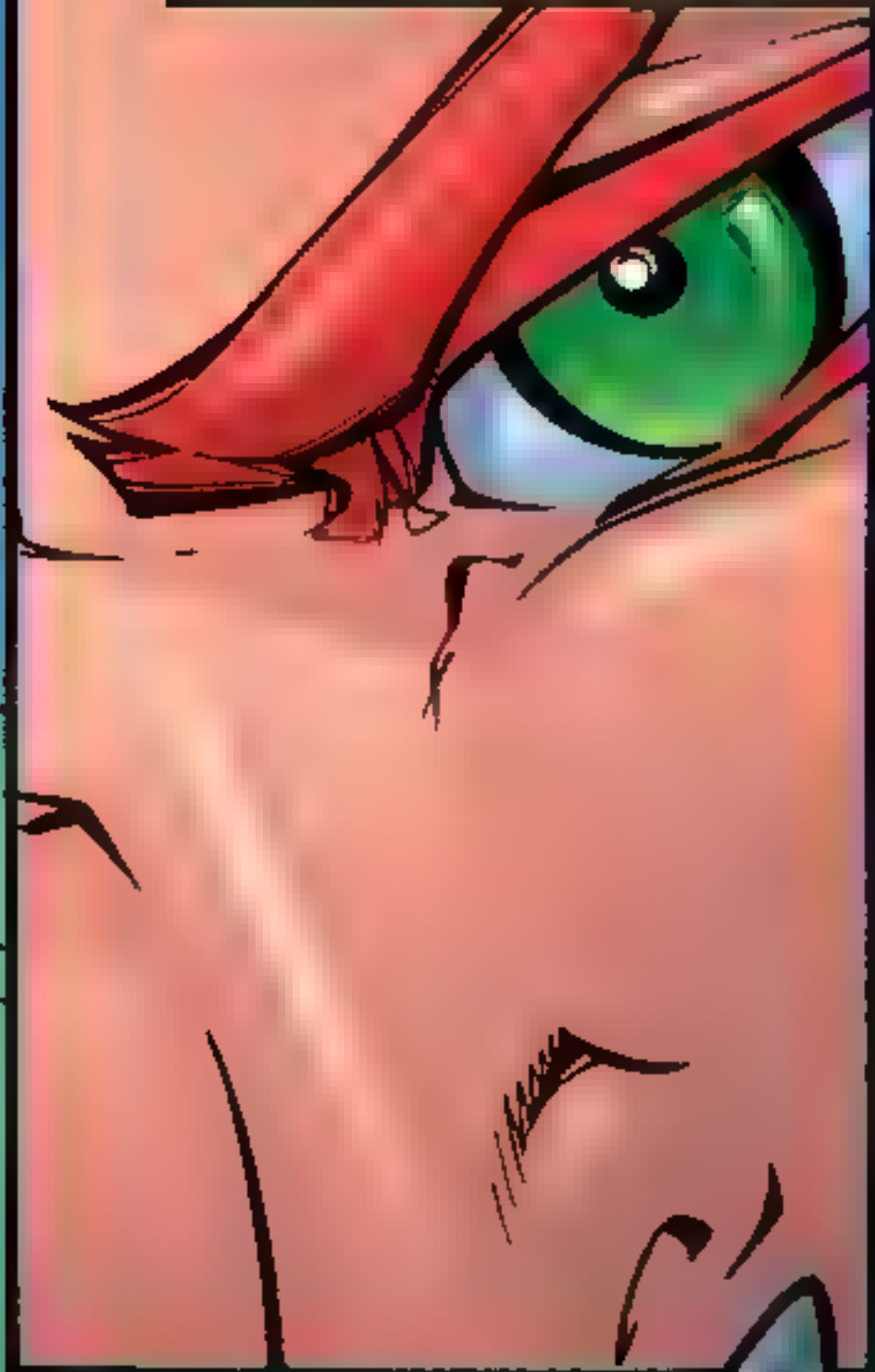


SHE KNOWS THAT WOLF OR NOT, SHE FEELS INTEGRATED WITHIN THE WEB OF LIFE THAT ENFOLDS CREATION.

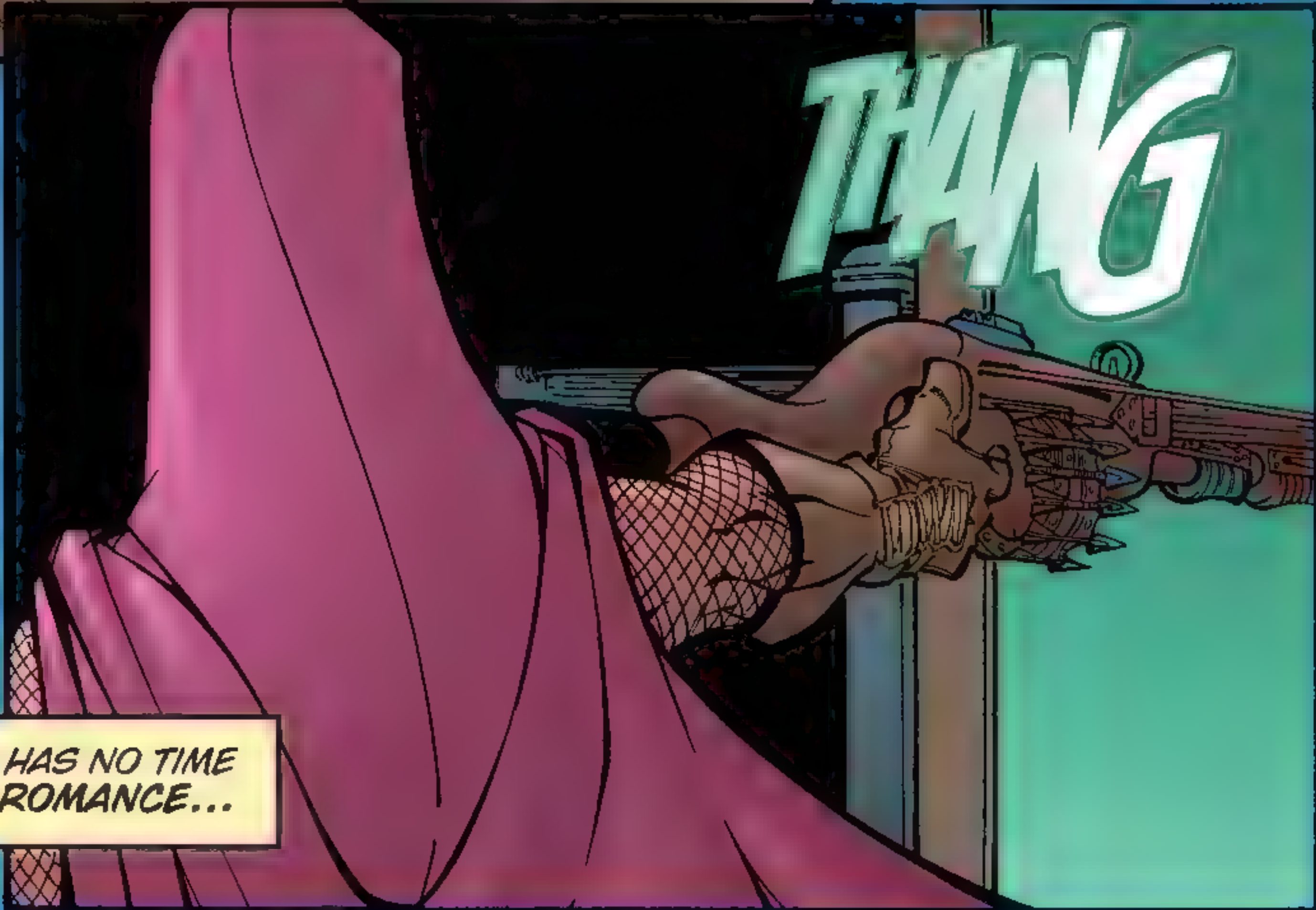
WHILE SHE TRIED TO LIVE APART AS A WOLFEN, SHE FELL UNDER THE SWAY OF A MEGALOMANIACAL WEREWOLF KING KNOWN AS DUMAS--HE HAD ALLIED HIMSELF WITH THE DRAGONS.

HE TAUGHT HER THAT SHE WAS A PREDATOR. A BEING WITH EVEN LESS NEED FOR HUMAN LOVE...

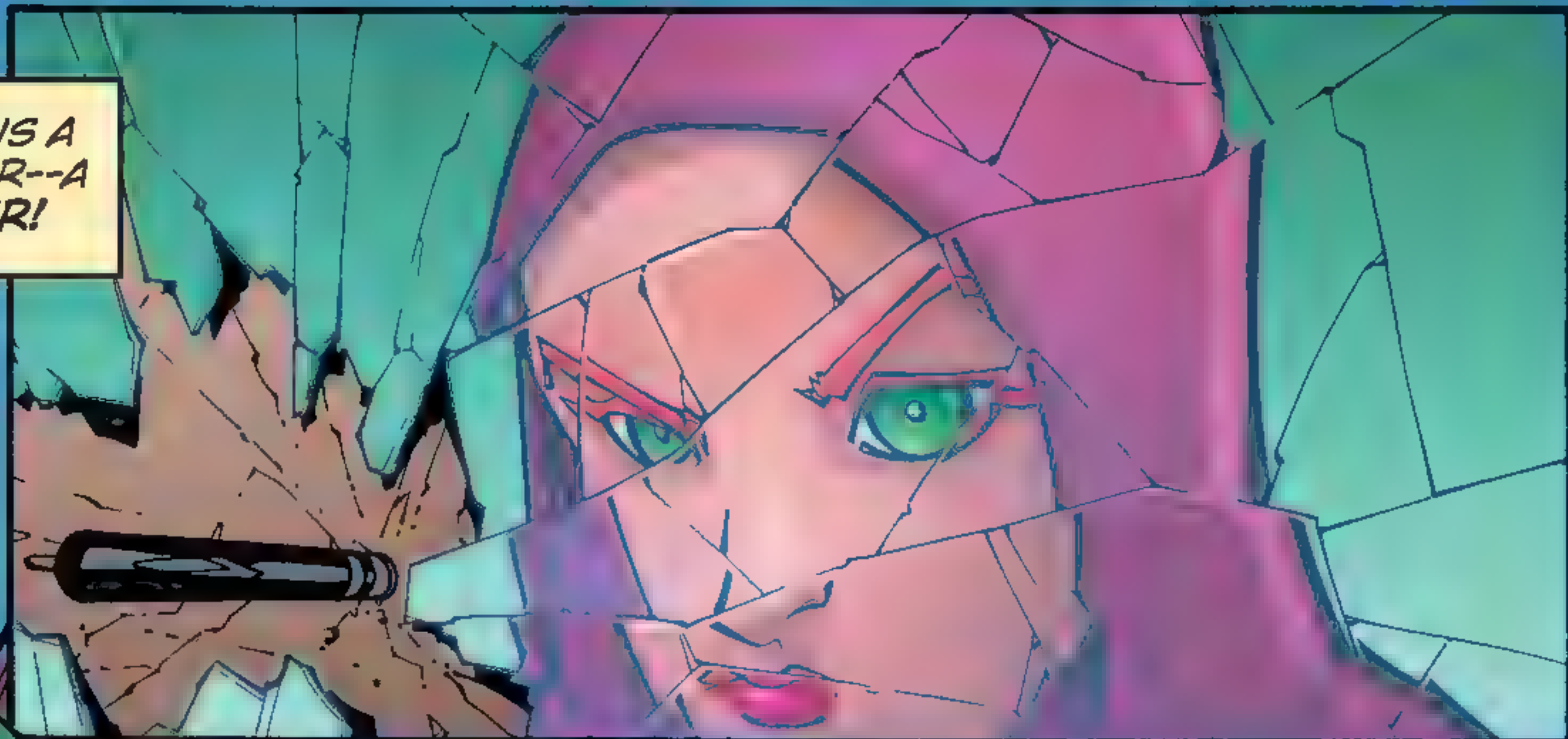
SHE WILL USE ALL OF HER TRAINING, ALL OF HER GENETIC FIERCENESS, ALL OF HER INSIGHT TO FIGHT FOR THE WORLD.



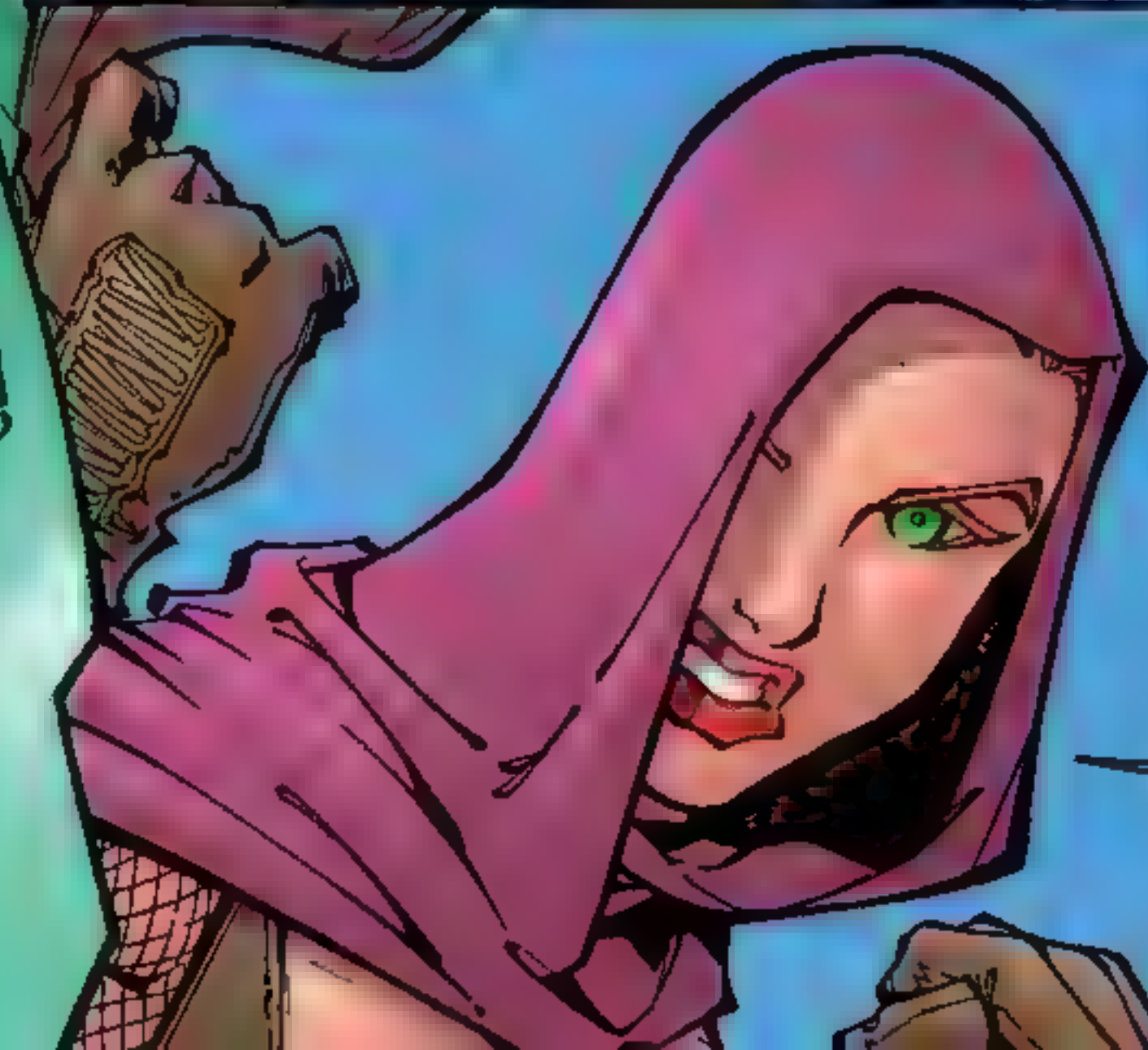
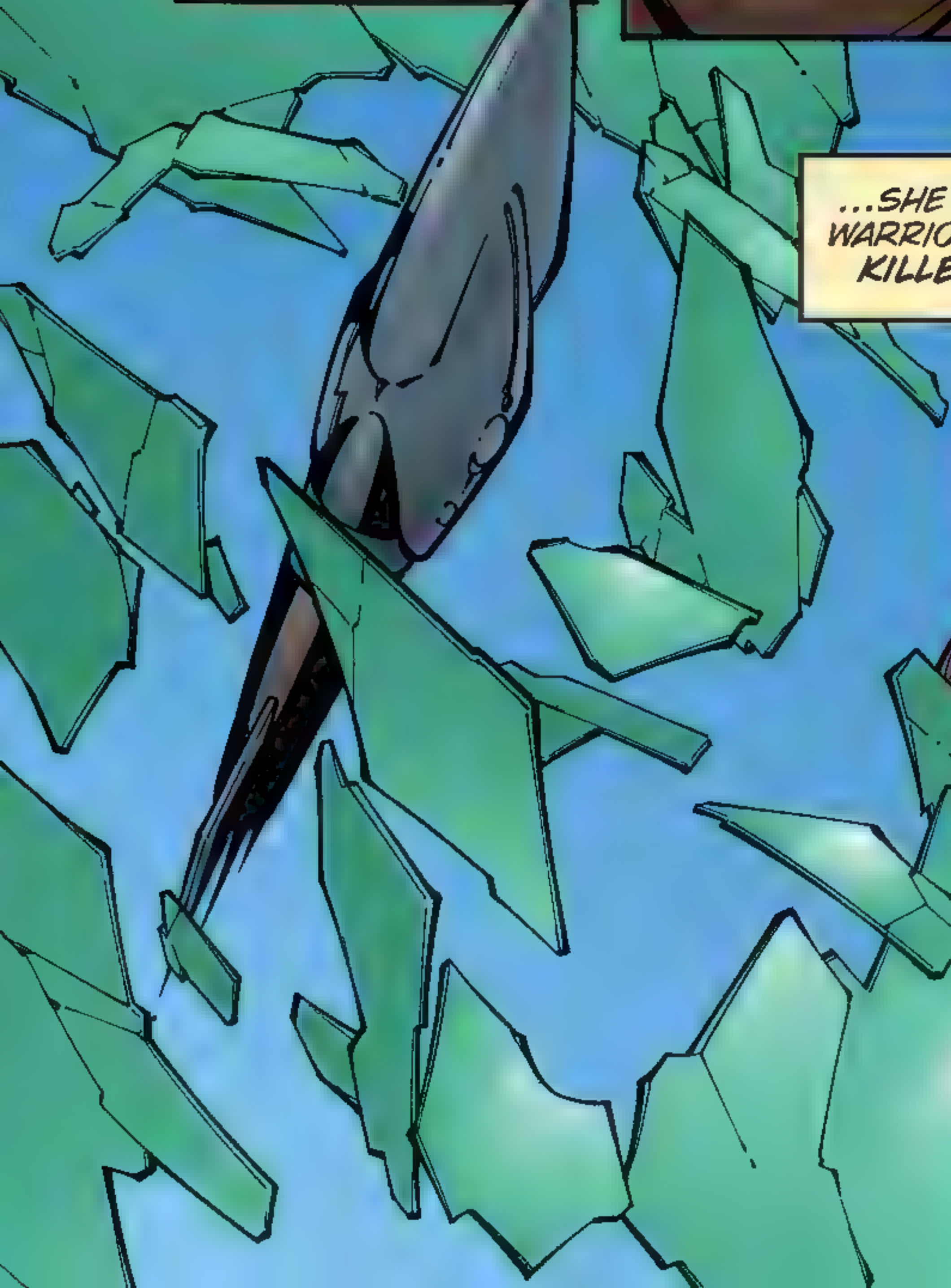
SHE HAS NO TIME FOR ROMANCE...



...SHE IS A WARRIOR--A KILLER!



WARRIOR. WOLF. WOMAN. ALL THESE FRAGMENTS, AND MORE, MAKE UP THE ILLUSION KNOWN AS SCARLET THINBAULT. IS LOVER ONE OF THOSE PIECES?



WHAT--? WHO'S THERE?!



HEL...LO?
IT'S ME, JOE--?
A FRIEND?

PLEASE
DON'T
SHOOT...

NEVER
ENTER MY
SPACE WITHOUT
INVITATION,
VAMPIRE!

NEVER!



HOO...

TWATCH



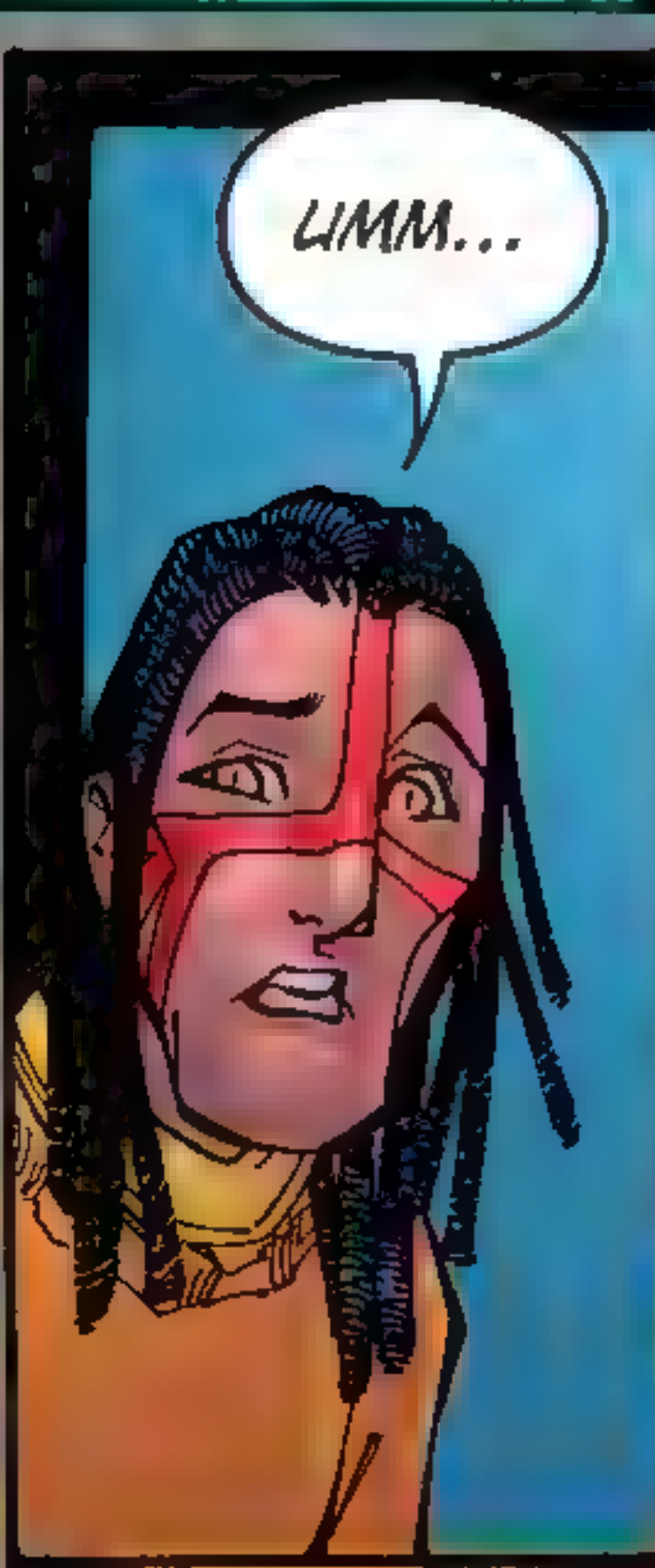
I HAVE NO
FRIENDS...ONLY
ALLIES--OR
ENEMIES.

OOOH--KAY.
WHATEVER
YOU SAY.



NOW.

WHAT
DO YOU
WANT?



UHM...



ALEX AND OLD
STONE-FACE ARE
DOWNSTAIRS MEETING
WITH THE OTHER RED
HOODS AND TEMPLAR
KNIGHTS. YOU WANT
IN ON THEIR
PLANS?

THE ABANDONED
HOTEL SHERIDAN--
IN THE KITCHEN...

SO WE'RE
KEEPING **DRAGON
MEAT** IN THE
FREEZER
FOR...?

FOR
THE **BLOOD**,
ALEX...



OH. ICK.
WHY?

U CUKI
SA EDO

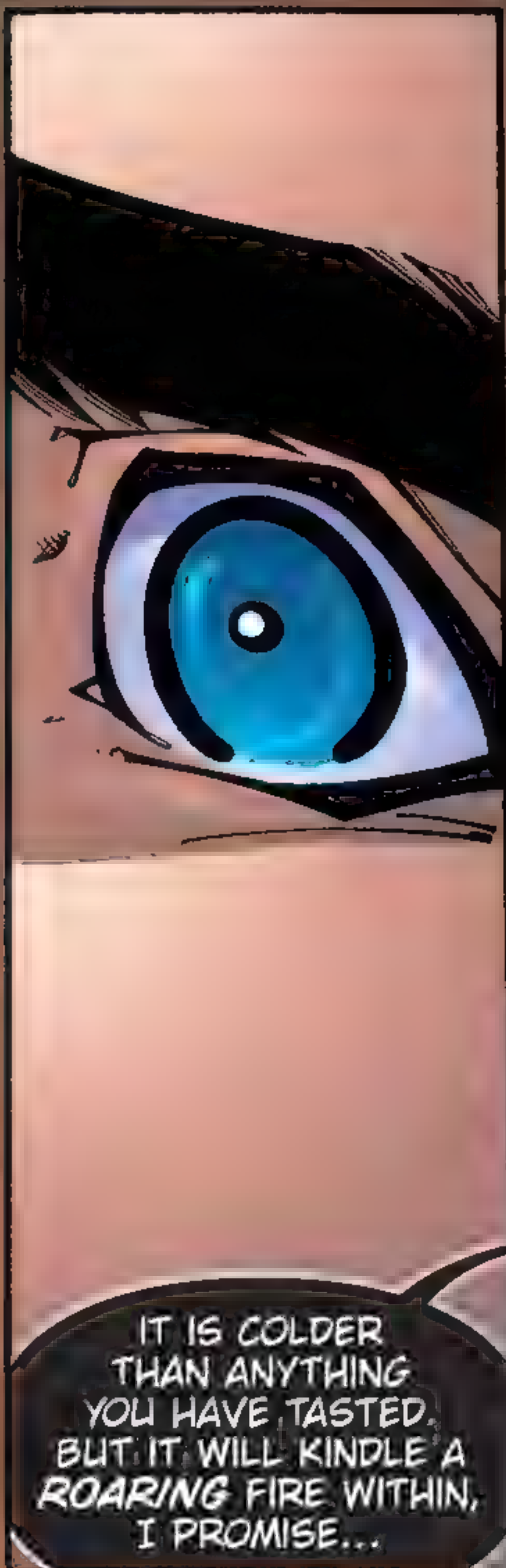
TO DRINK, ALEX.
IT IS A SOURCE
OF REMARKABLE
VITALITY AND
REFRESHMENT.

WE WILL NEED
THAT **VITALITY** IN
THE COMING
BATTLES.

GULP GULP GULP

DRAGON BLOOD
IS **CELESTIAL** IN ORIGIN, IT
HAS **MIRACULOUS CURATIVE**
PROPERTIES. IT WILL MAKE
YOU **STRONG**. DRINK
IT.

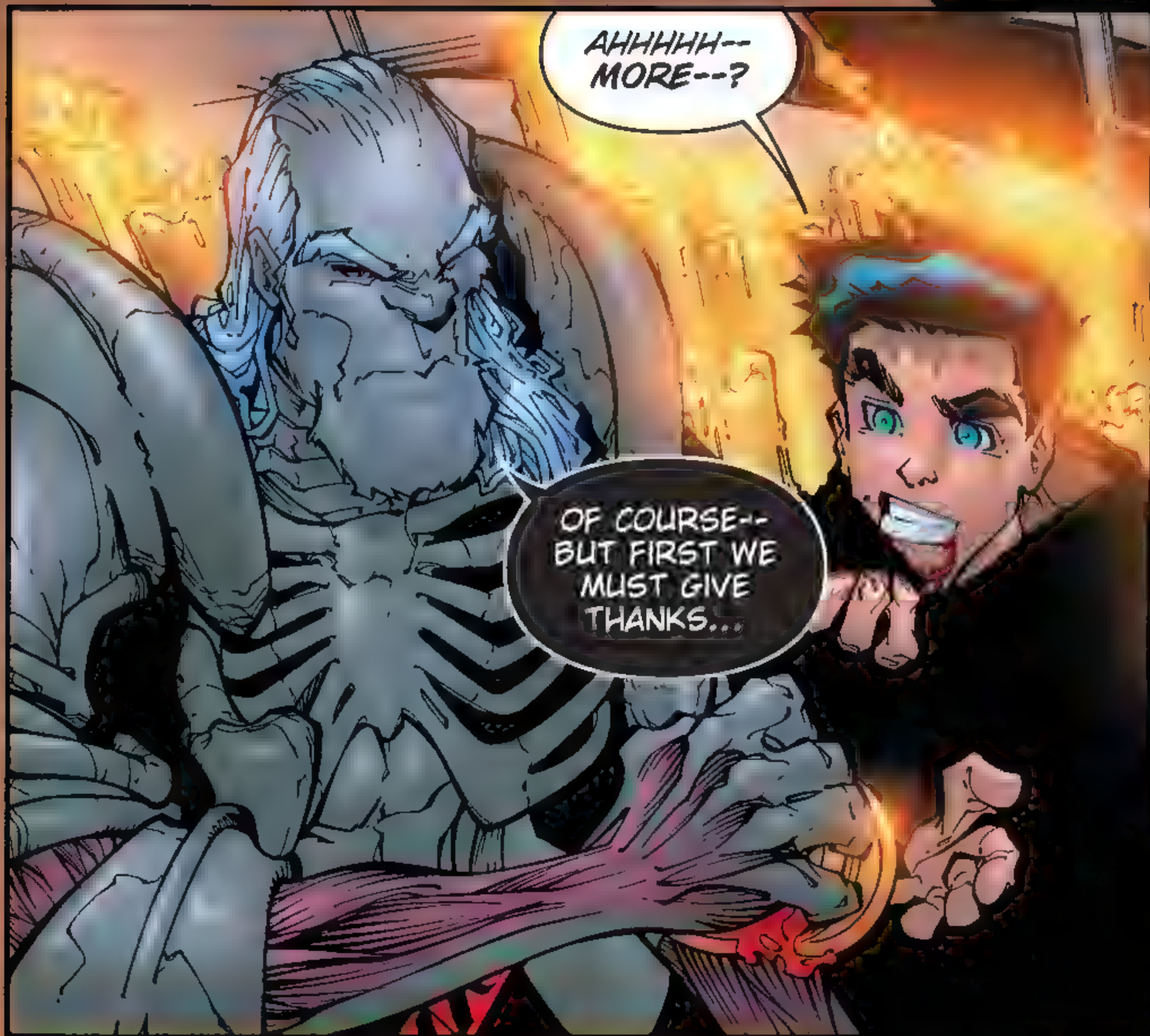
UUMMM...?



IT IS COLDER
THAN ANYTHING
YOU HAVE TASTED.
BUT IT WILL KINDLE A
ROARING FIRE WITHIN,
I PROMISE...



GULP
GULP GULP



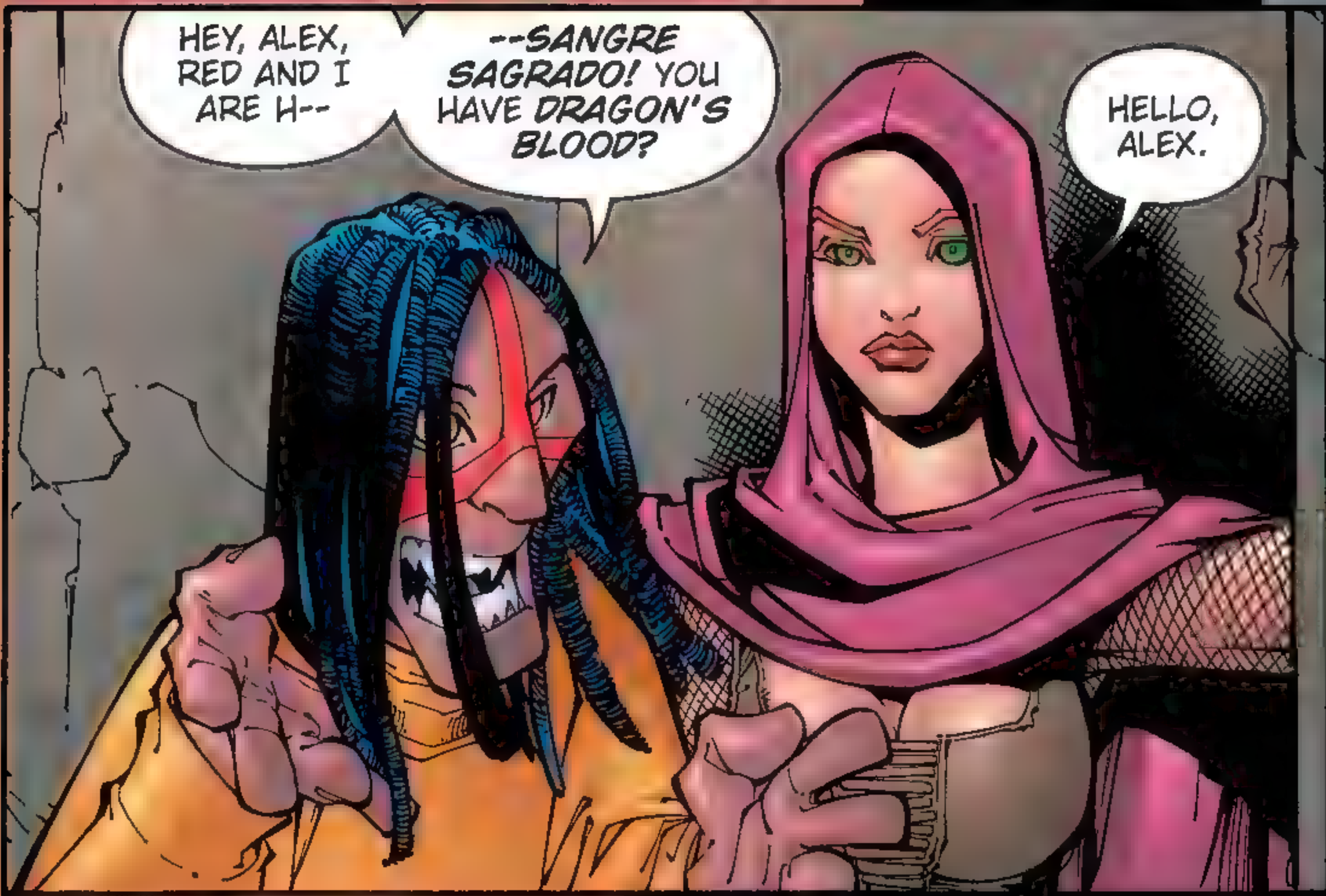
AHHHHH--
MORE--?

OF COURSE--
BUT FIRST WE
MUST GIVE
THANKS...



...THIS
BLOOD IS A GIFT
OF HEAVEN. TAKING IT
REQUIRES SPECIAL
DISPENSATIONS AND
PRAYERS...

SI TTHBO
CHS CHAICHA
TKTELE ETHINN
VALKLO JOHKN.



HEY, ALEX,
RED AND I
ARE H--

--SANGRE
SAGRADO! YOU
HAVE DRAGON'S
BLOOD?

HELLO,
ALEX.



AHHHHH--

GLOOB--

THIS IS
BUT ONE THING
THAT MARKS YOU AS
APART FROM OTHER
VAMPIRES, ALEX. YOU
NEVER ALLOW YOUR
ANIMAL PASSIONS
TO RULE...

RIGHT...
NOT ME--

SLUUUURRRP!

THE HOTEL SERVES THE RESISTANCE AS A SHELTER AND HEADQUARTERS...AND IS COMMON GROUND FOR THE DIVERSE FACTIONS DRAWN TO THE ANTI-DRAGON CAMPAIGNS...

I WISH THEY WOULDN'T STARE.

ONCE PEOPLE HEAR THAT I AM AN EARTH-BOUND ANGEL, THEY FOLLOW ME EVERYTHING SEEKING INSPIRATION... ANSWERS. I HAVE NO ANSWERS...

YES...THAT I SEEM TO BE THE INCARNATION OF ST. GEORGE SINGLES ME OUT FOR THE SAME...PIOUS INTRUSIONS. THEY NEED TO BELIEVE **SOMEONE** HAS A HOT-LINE TO HEAVEN IN A CRISIS LIKE THIS.

AS FOR ME, WELL, I'M NOT SURE THAT GOD **EVER** HEARS MY PRAYERS...

NO...GOD HEARS **EVERYONE**.

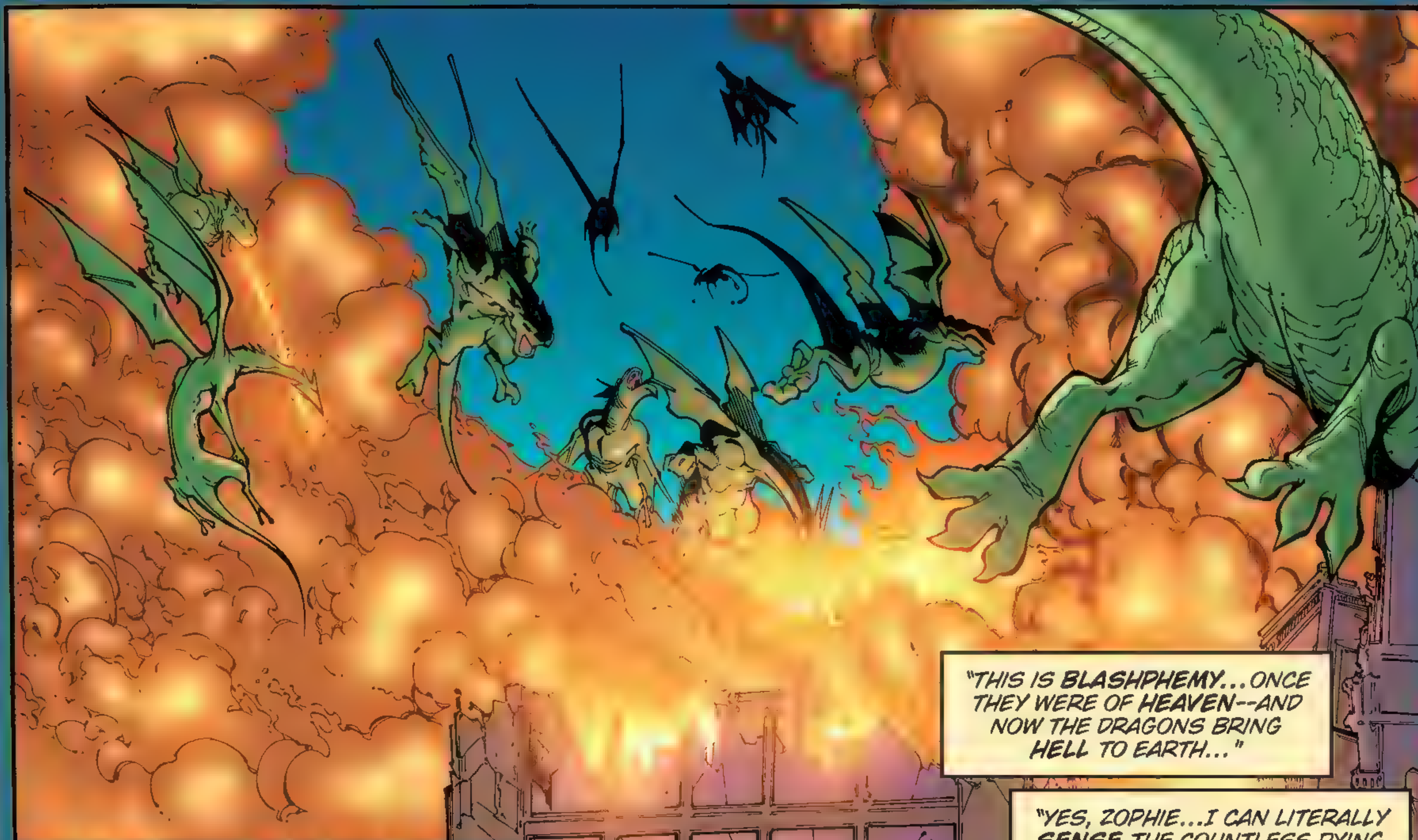
WELL...I HOPE SO, BUT IT'S SO-O-O EASY TO THINK WE'RE ALL JUST **INSANE**. I MEAN, SAINTS, VAMPIRES, **DRAGONS**...AND YOU, **ANGEL ZOPHIEL**. **WHOA--!**

IT **IS** A LOT TO BELIEVE...

NO... I **BELIEVE** IT ALL EASILY. I JUST CAN'T MAKE ANY SENSE OF IT...SIX MONTHS AGO, I WAS A COP FROM HARLEM, NOW I'M A CHRISTIAN **LEGEND--?** IT'S NUTS...

...BUT **TRUE**. AND THOSE FLAMES OF THE DRAGON'S DESTRUCTION ARE **PROOF**.

YES, THE POWER OF SAPHA THE **DRAGON-KING** GROWS AS OURS DIMINISHES.



"THIS IS BLASPHEMY... ONCE THEY WERE OF HEAVEN--AND NOW THE DRAGONS BRING HELL TO EARTH..."

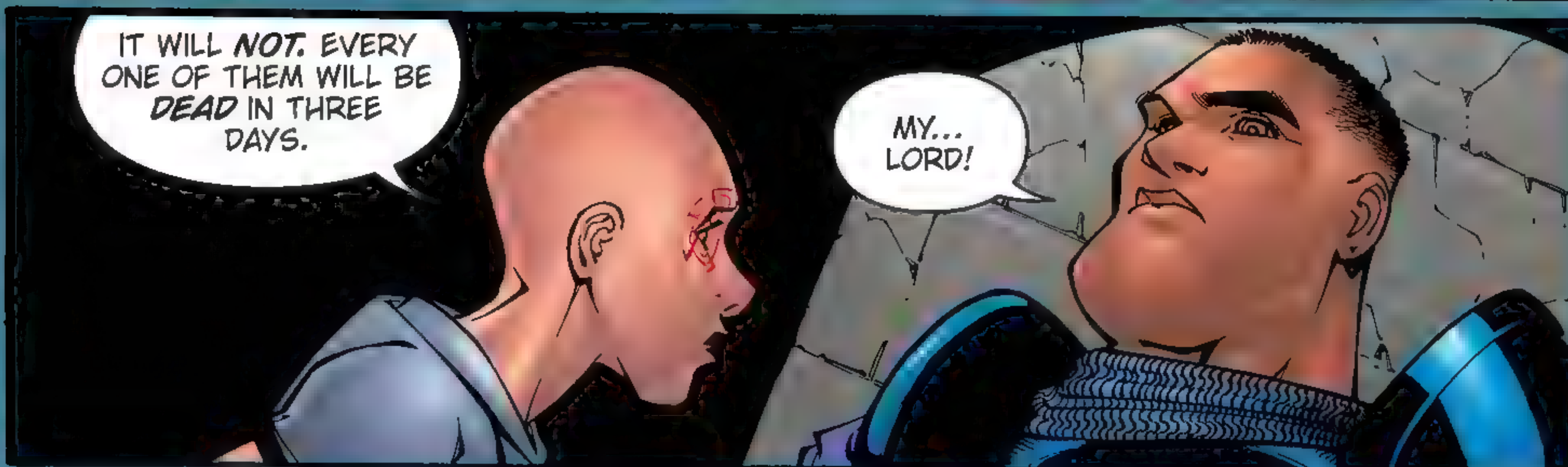
"YES, ZOPHIE... I CAN LITERALLY SENSE THE COUNTLESS DYING SOULS OUT THERE. I NEED TO DO SOMETHING!"



PATIENT, ST. GEORGE. YOUR TIME IS **ORDAINED**... AND SOON TO COME.

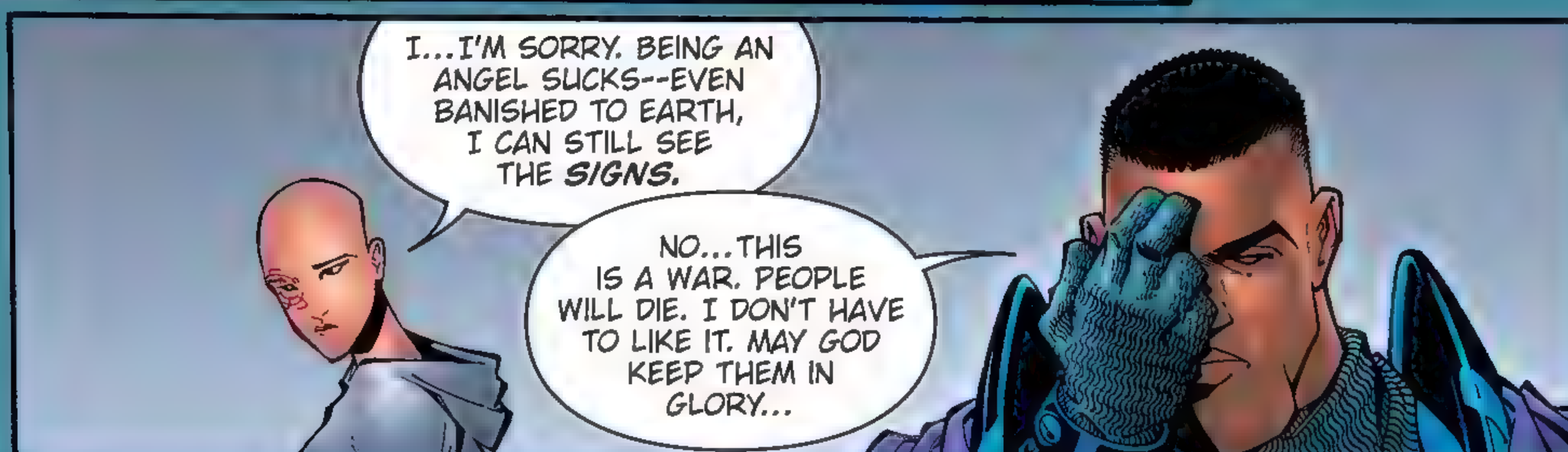
THANKS, ANGEL, I KNOW. BUT THE WAITING IS **KILLING** ME.

IT'S GOOD TO SEE ALL THE WARRING FACTIONS UNITED BY THE COMMON THREAT. I HOPE IT LASTS.



IT WILL **NOT**. EVERY ONE OF THEM WILL BE **DEAD** IN THREE DAYS.

MY... LORD!



I... I'M SORRY. BEING AN ANGEL SUCKS--EVEN BANISHED TO EARTH, I CAN STILL SEE THE **SIGNS**.

NO... THIS IS A WAR. PEOPLE WILL DIE. I DON'T HAVE TO LIKE IT. MAY GOD KEEP THEM IN GLORY...

NEW YORK IS A CITY CRUSHED
BENEATH THE WEIGHT OF
AN EONS-OLD VENDETTA.

THE DRAGONS WERE THE FIRST OF
CREATION AND FAVORITES OF THE
CREATOR. BUT IT WAS TO HUMANS
THAT GOD GAVE THE EARTH--AND
THE FULLNESS OF DIVINE LOVE.

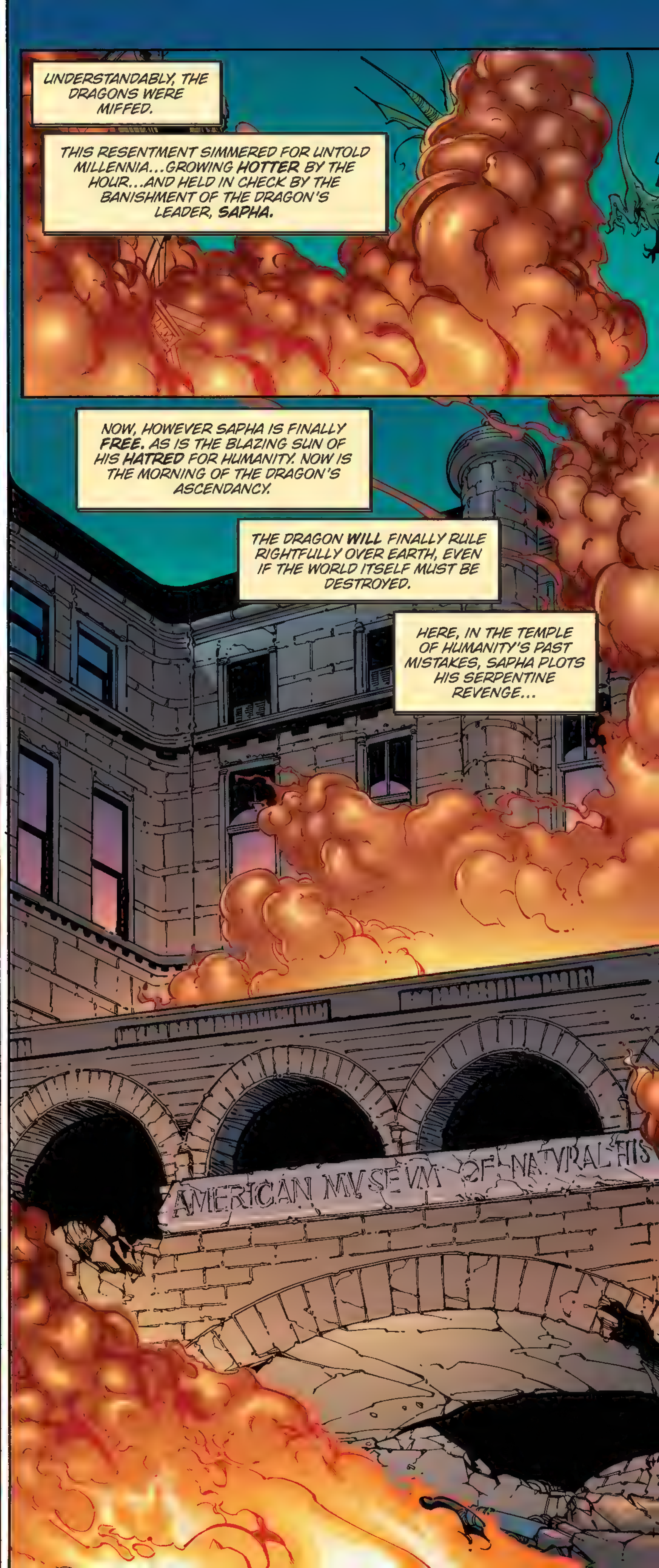
UNDERSTANDABLY, THE
DRAGONS WERE
MIFFED.

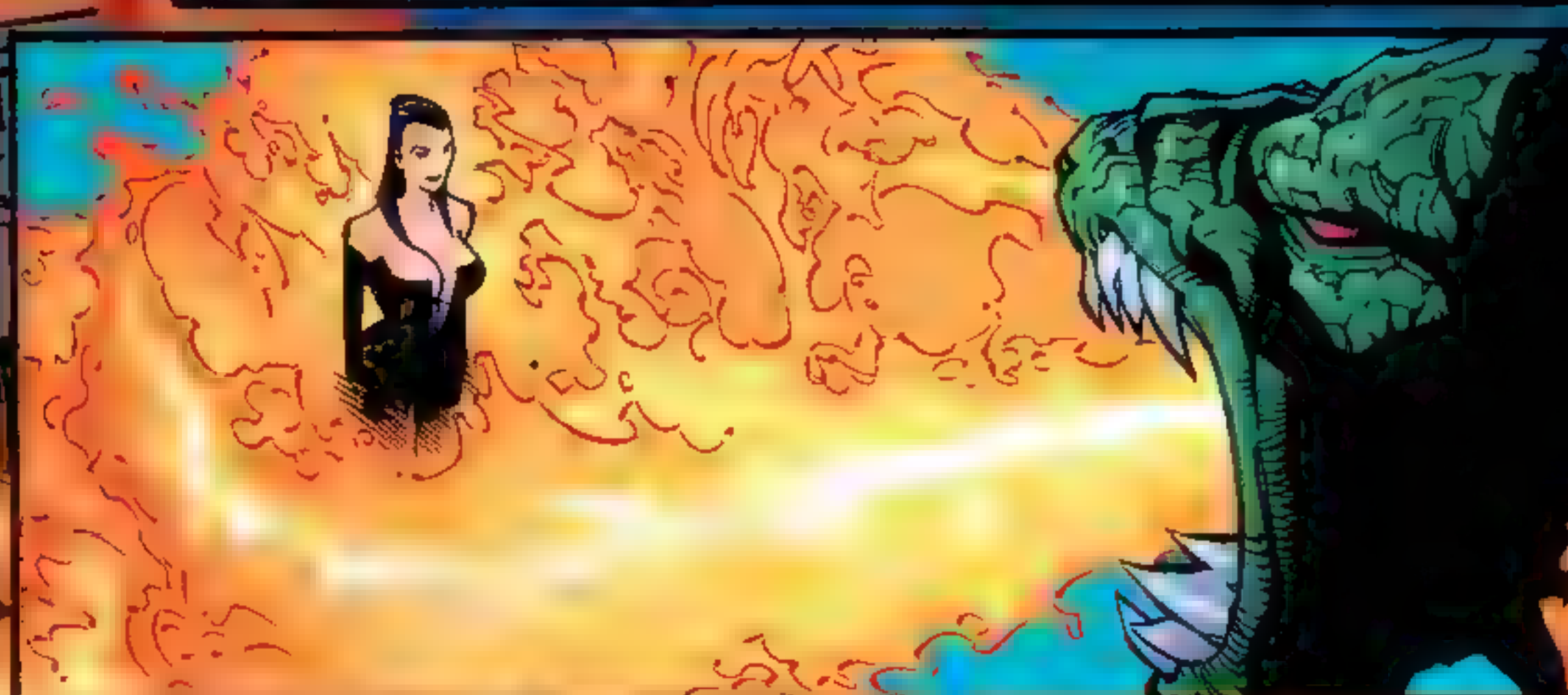
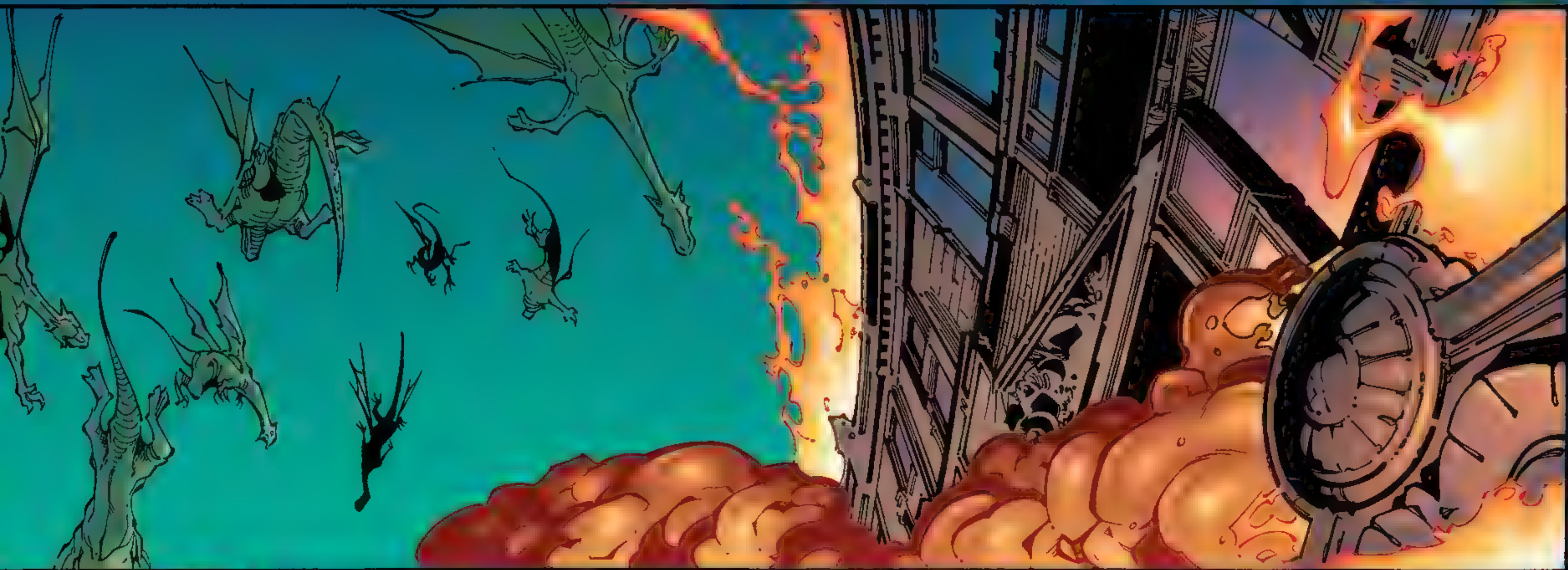
THIS RESENTMENT SIMMERED FOR UNTOLD
MILLENNIA...GROWING HOTTER BY THE
HOUR...AND HELD IN CHECK BY THE
BANISHMENT OF THE DRAGON'S
LEADER, SAPHA.

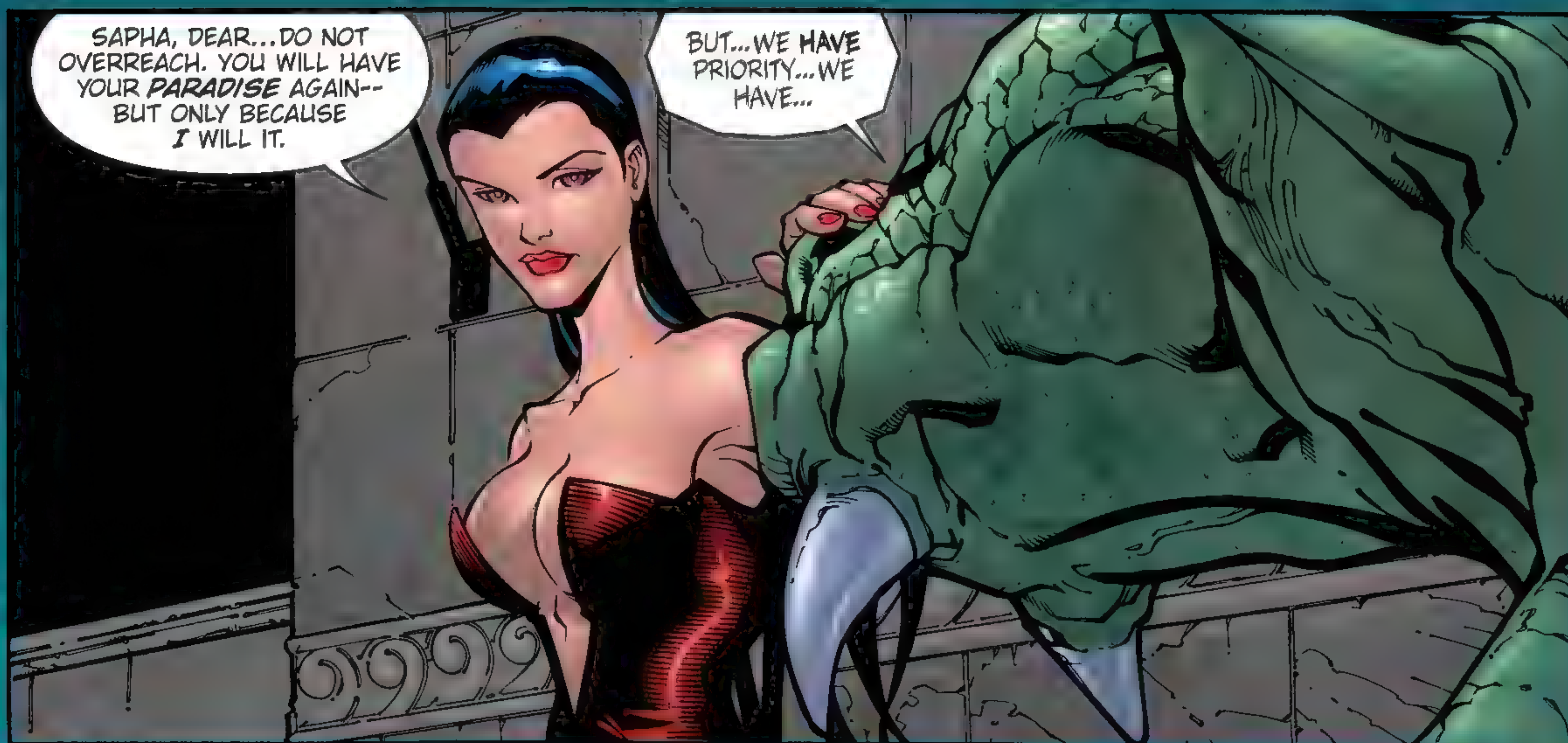
NOW, HOWEVER SAPHA IS FINALLY
FREE. AS IS THE BLAZING SUN OF
HIS HATRED FOR HUMANITY. NOW IS
THE MORNING OF THE DRAGON'S
ASCENDANCY.

THE DRAGON WILL FINALLY RULE
RIGHTFULLY OVER EARTH, EVEN
IF THE WORLD ITSELF MUST BE
DESTROYED.

HERE, IN THE TEMPLE
OF HUMANITY'S PAST
MISTAKES, SAPHA PLOTS
HIS SERPENTINE
REVENGE...

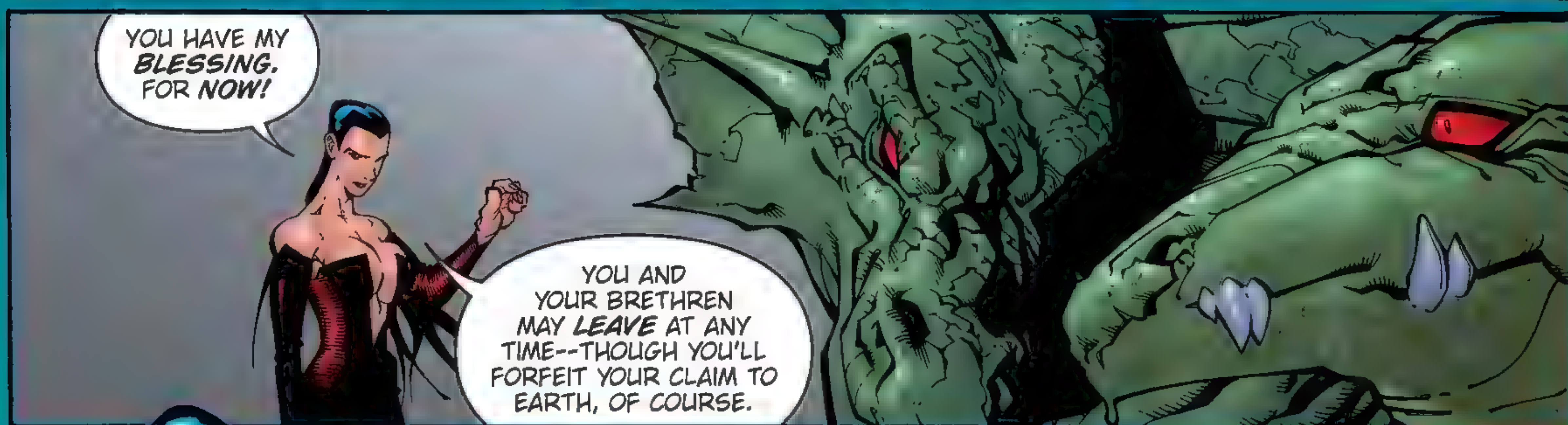






SAPHA, DEAR...DO NOT OVERREACH. YOU WILL HAVE YOUR *PARADISE* AGAIN-- BUT ONLY BECAUSE I WILL IT.

BUT...WE HAVE PRIORITY...WE HAVE...



YOU HAVE MY *BLESSING*, FOR NOW!

YOU AND YOUR BRETHREN MAY *LEAVE* AT ANY TIME--THOUGH YOU'LL FORFEIT YOUR CLAIM TO EARTH, OF COURSE.

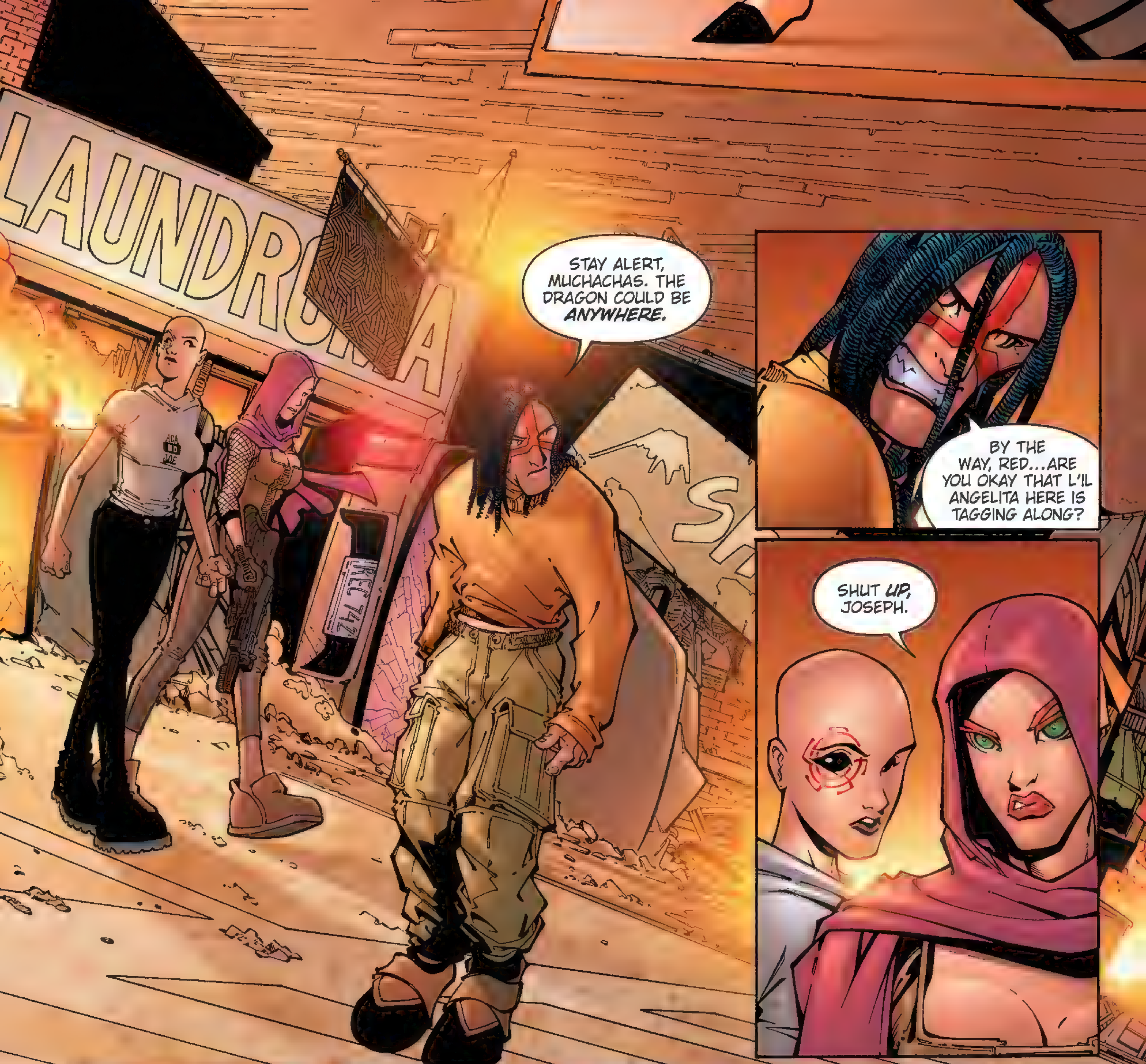


NEVER LET IT BE SAID THAT I AM *RIGID* OR *AUTOCRATIC*... THE CHOICE IS COMPLETELY *YOURS* TO MAKE.

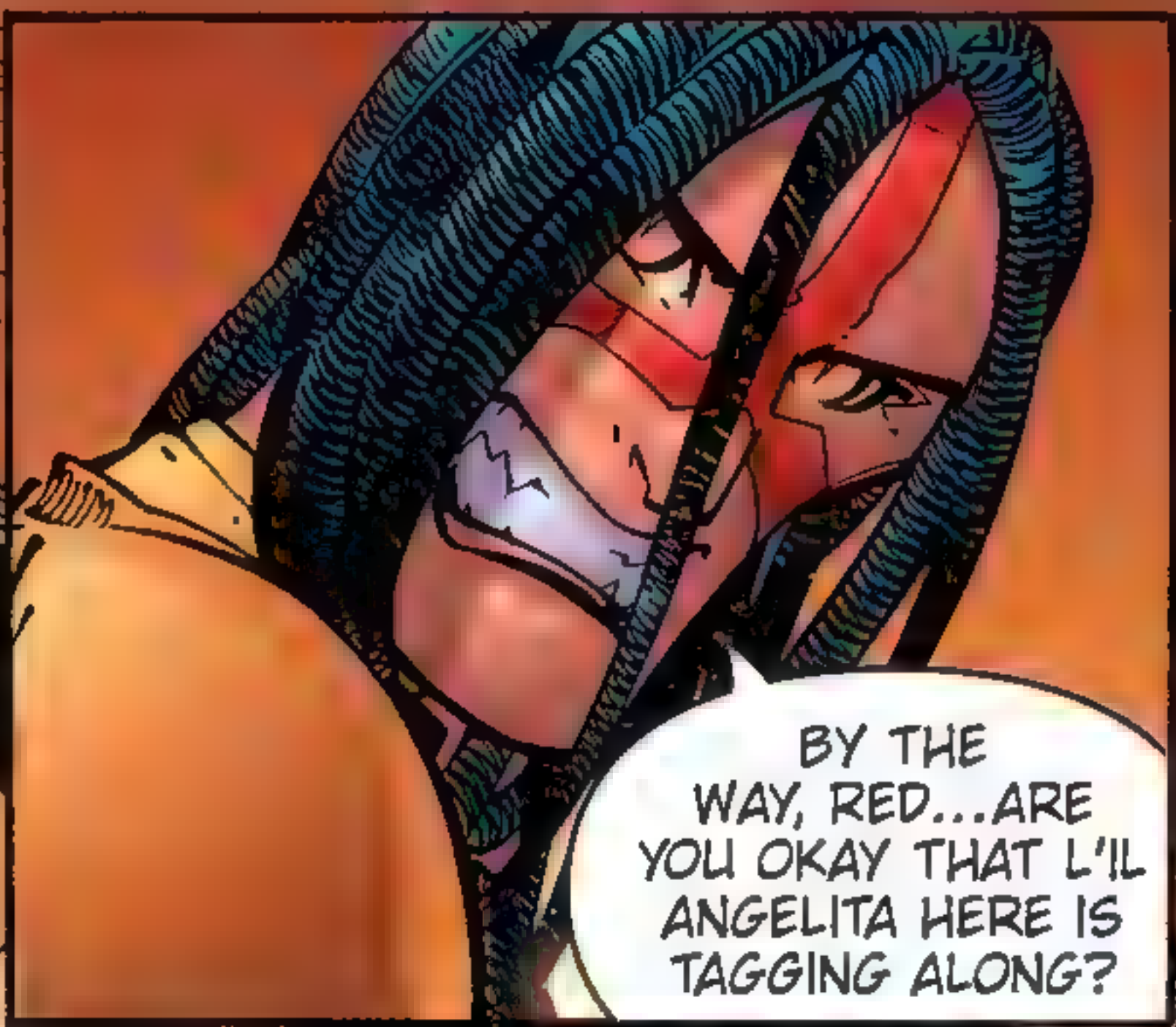
RECALL, DRAGON-- I WAS *THERE* AT THE DAWN OF TIME WHEN YOU HAD YOUR *FREEDOM* TAKEN. I KNOW HOW THE CREATOR *BOUND* YOU...AND, AS YOU SAW, I AM *IMMUNE* TO YOUR FIRE.

ARE WE CLEAR? DO WE UNDERSTAND *WHO* LEADS HERE...?

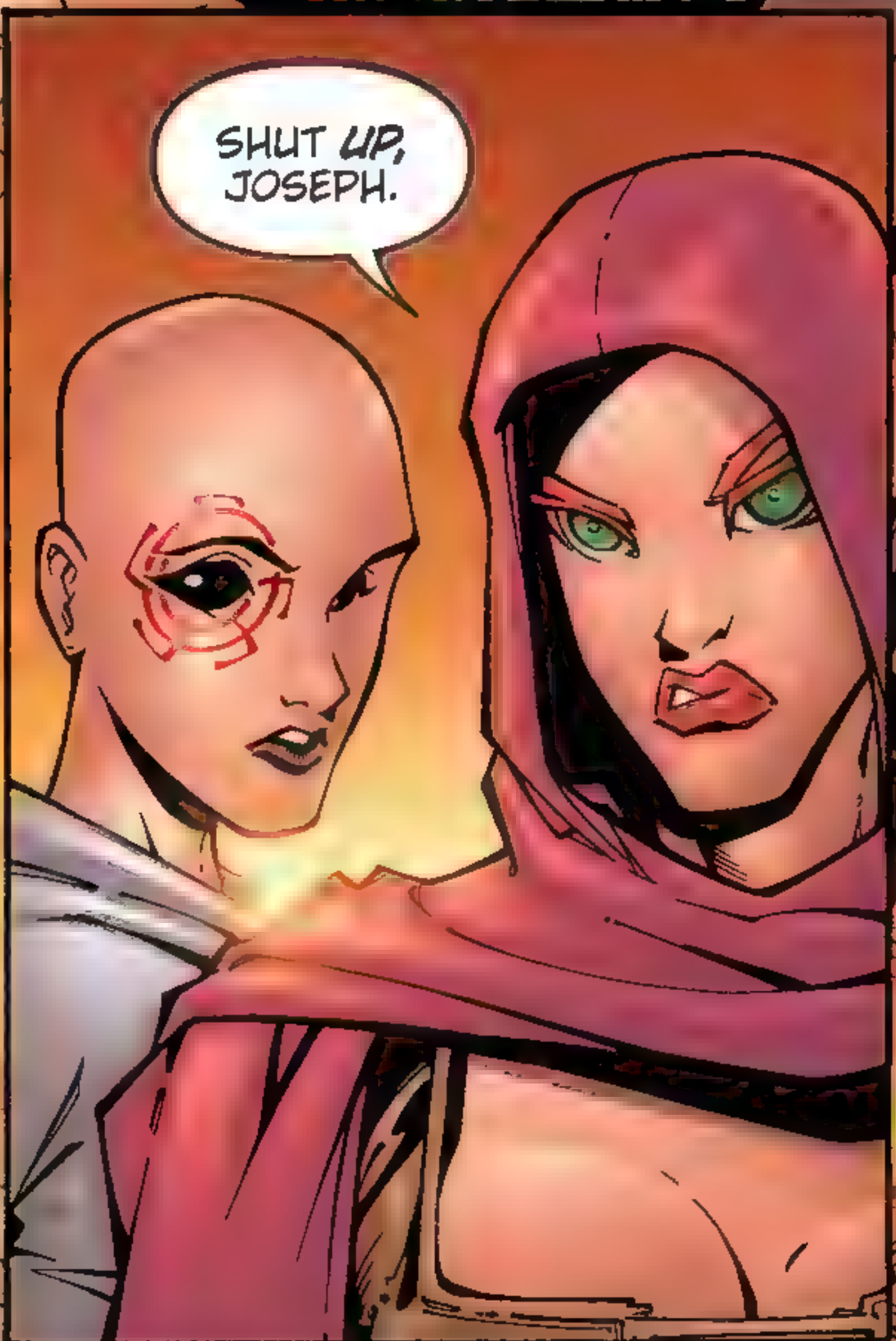
YES.



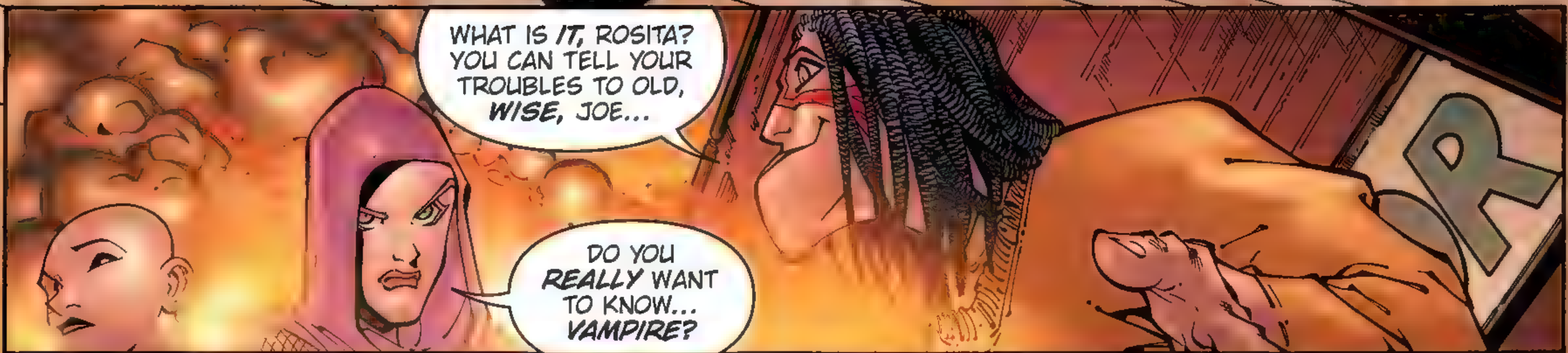
STAY ALERT,
MUCHACHAS. THE
DRAGON COULD BE
ANYWHERE.



BY THE
WAY, RED...ARE
YOU OKAY THAT L'IL
ANGELITA HERE IS
TAGGING ALONG?

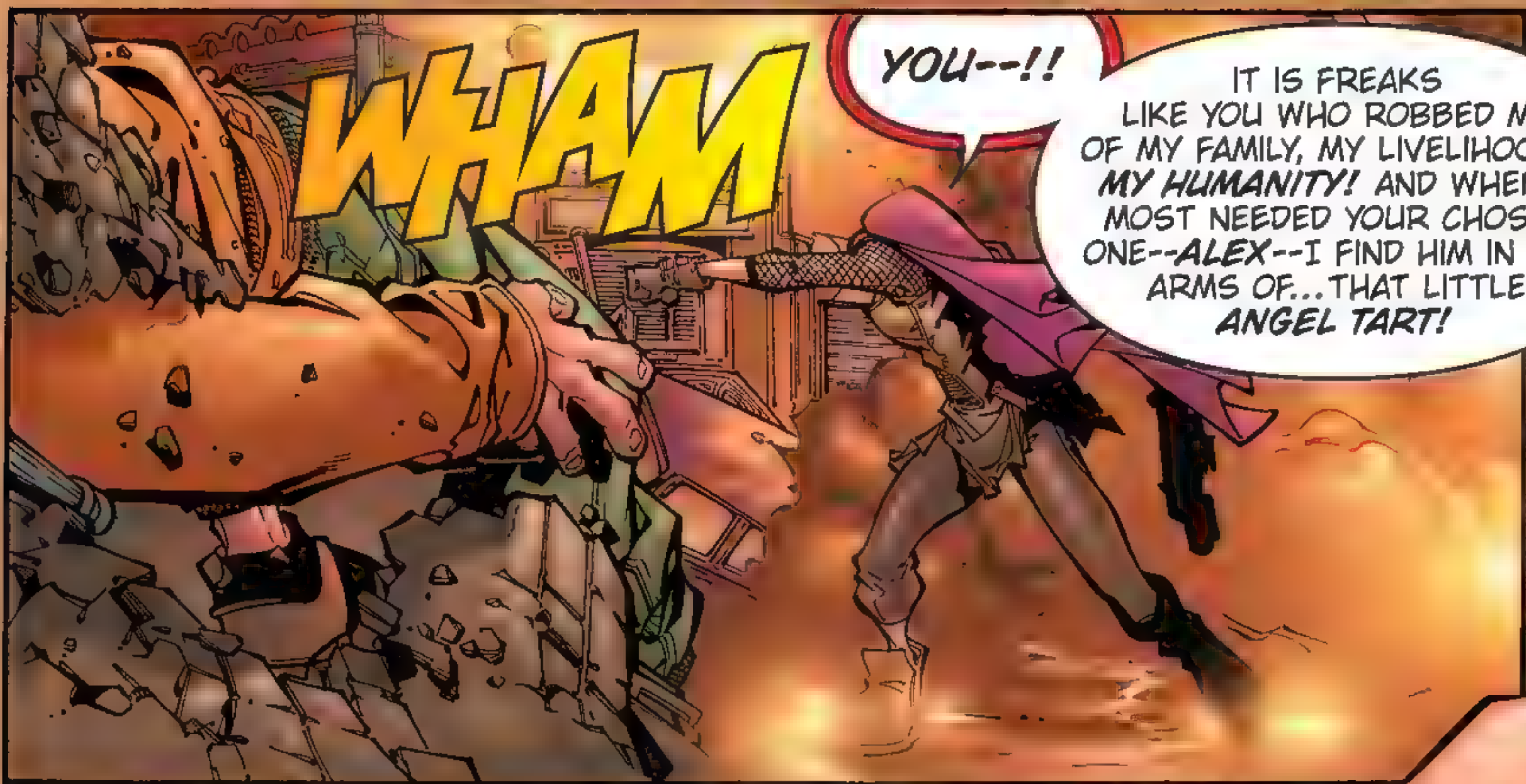


SHUT UP,
JOSEPH.



WHAT IS IT, ROSITA?
YOU CAN TELL YOUR
TROUBLES TO OLD,
WISE, JOE...

DO YOU
REALLY WANT
TO KNOW...
VAMPIRE?



YOU--!!

IT IS FREAKS
LIKE YOU WHO ROBBED ME
OF MY FAMILY, MY LIVELIHOOD--
MY HUMANITY! AND WHEN I
MOST NEEDED YOUR CHOSEN
ONE--ALEX--I FIND HIM IN THE
ARMS OF...THAT LITTLE
ANGEL TART!



I'M NOT SURE WHAT I DID TO YOU. ALEX IS MY **FRIEND** AND I AM SURE HE IS **YOURS** AS WELL.

IF YOU NEED HIM, I KNOW ALEX WILL HELP. YOU SHOULDN'T BE SO **SELF-PITYING**.

AND YOU ARE **SELFISH** IF YOU THINK YOU CAN TELL ALEX WHO TO **HELP**.

OKAY--**THAT** JUST DOESN'T MAKE **ANY** SENSE.

WILL YOU ORDER HIM TO BITE YOU ON THE NECK, SO YOU CAN BE WITH HIM **FOREVER?!**

--?!

NO. DO YOU WANT THAT?

OKAY, LADIES--**PEACE... PEACE...!**

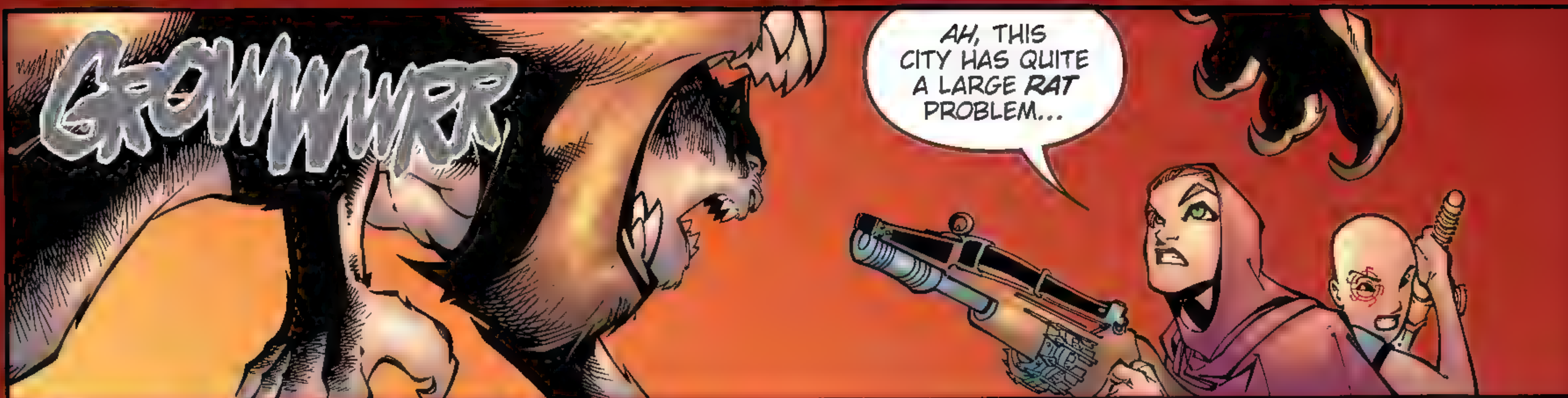
SHUT UP, JOSEPH...

I SEE NO REASON TO TAKE THIS FROM YOU, **ANGEL-TRASH!**

LET US SEE IF THEY WILL LET YOU **BACK** INTO HEAVEN, EH--?

LET'S NOT GET CARRIED AWAY, SCARLET. WE HAVE CONCERNS **LARGER** THAN PETTY JEALOUSIES TO DEAL WITH.





AH, THIS CITY HAS QUITE A LARGE RAT PROBLEM...



"MAN, WHERE'S ALEX? BOBO'S MISSIN' ALL THE FUN!"

SOLOMON'S CLAVICLE IS FRYING THESE BIG BEASTIES GOOD!

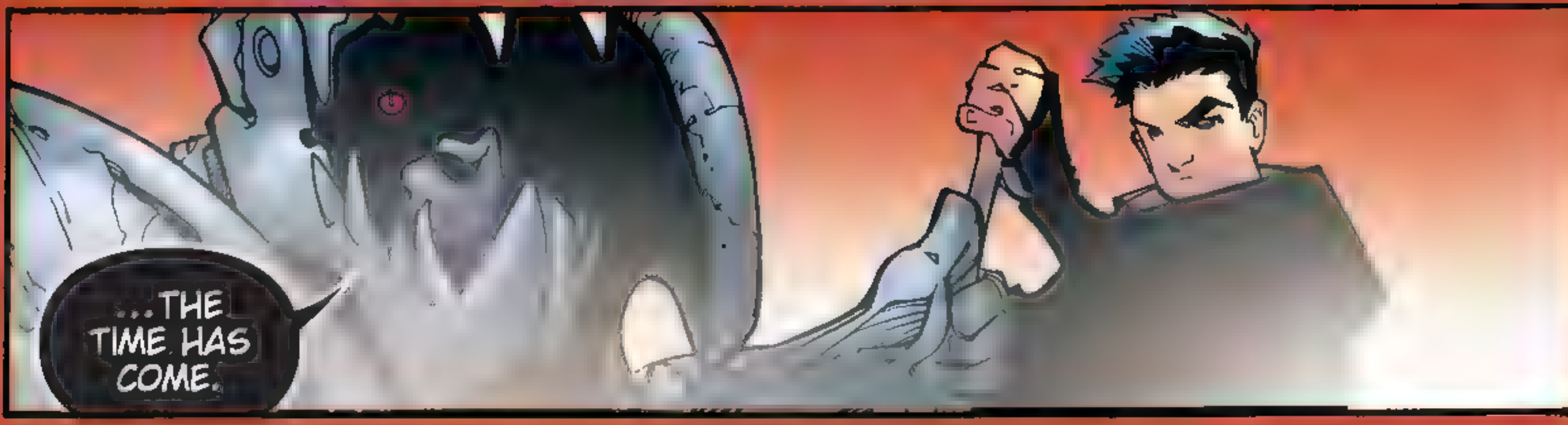


YES, BUT A RELIC ALONE WILL NOT DEFEAT THIS ENEMY. COME, LET US GO TO SAPHA.



THE DRAGONS ARE LETTING US PASS? WE MUST BE EXPECTED.

WE GO ON ALL THE SAME...



...THE TIME HAS COME.



THE TIME
FOR DRAGONS TO
OWN THE WORLD,
GRIGORI?
CORRECT

TIME FOR
YOU AND YOUR
BELOVED HUMANITY
TO CEASE? CORRECT
AGAIN.



BIG...

TOO
BIG...

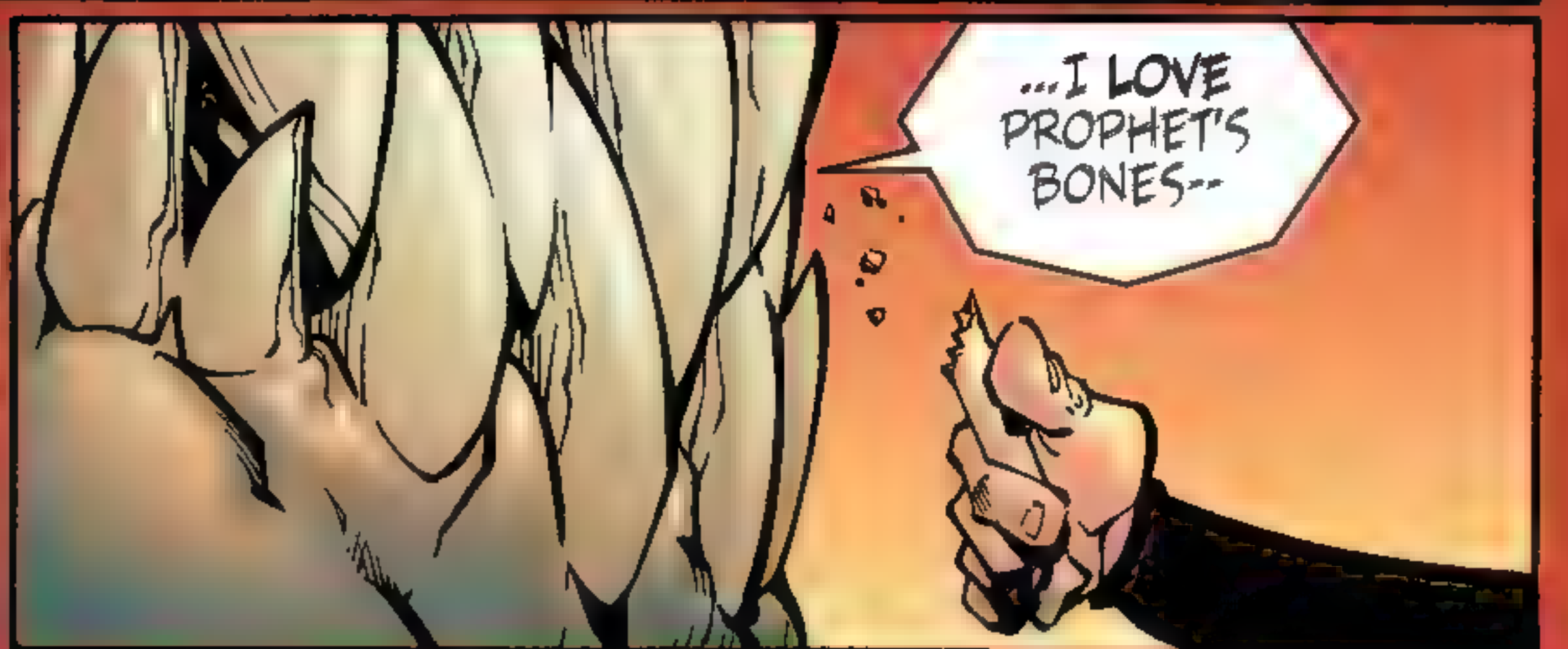


WATCH
IT, LIZARD!
THE CLAVICLE OF
SOLOMON HAS
THE POWER
TO--!!

ST-STAND
B-BACK--!



AHHH--
PROPHET'S
BONES...



...I LOVE
PROPHET'S
BONES--



IMMORTALITY
SHOULD HAVE MADE
YOU SMARTER,
GRIGORI.

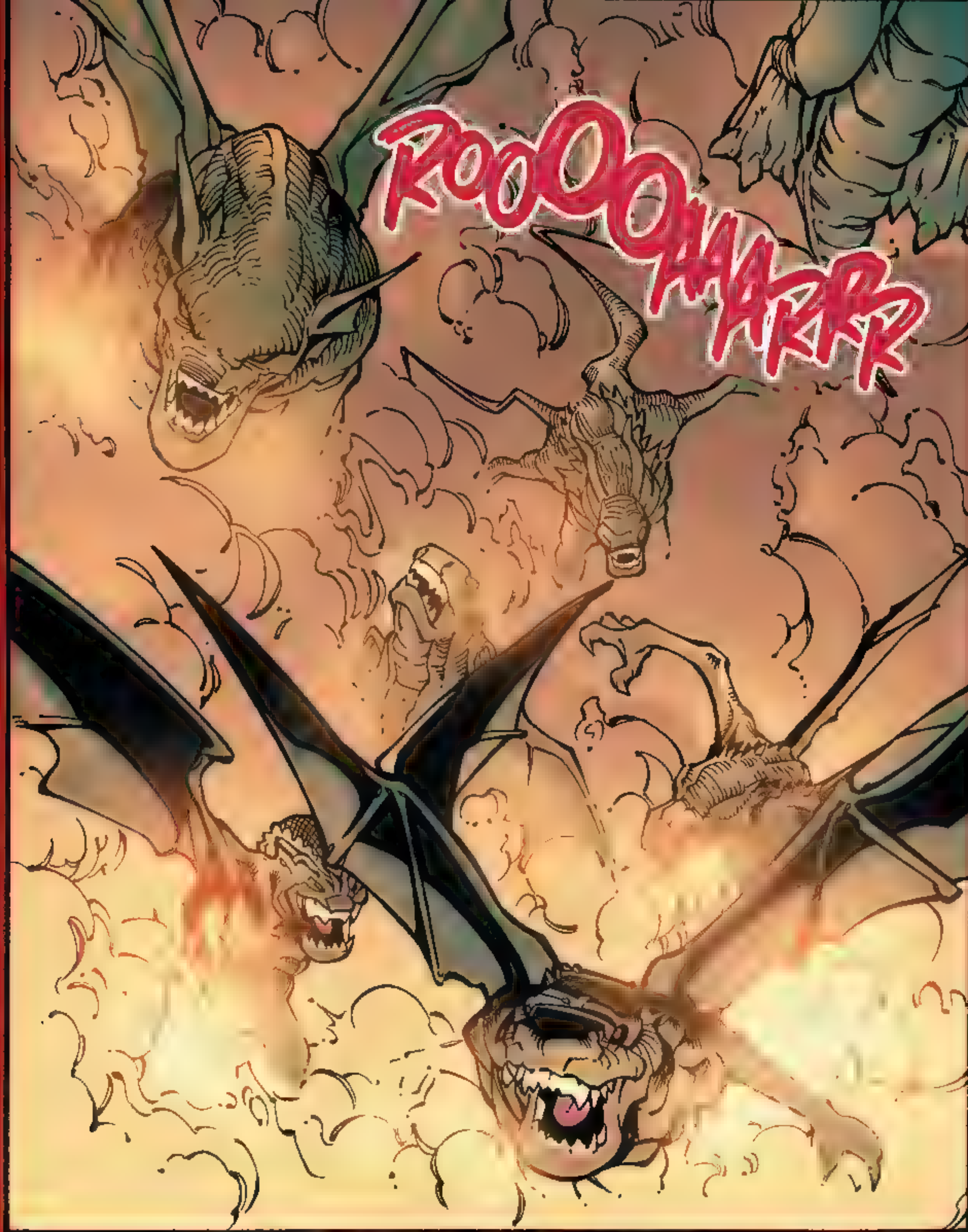
LET US
FINISH IT...



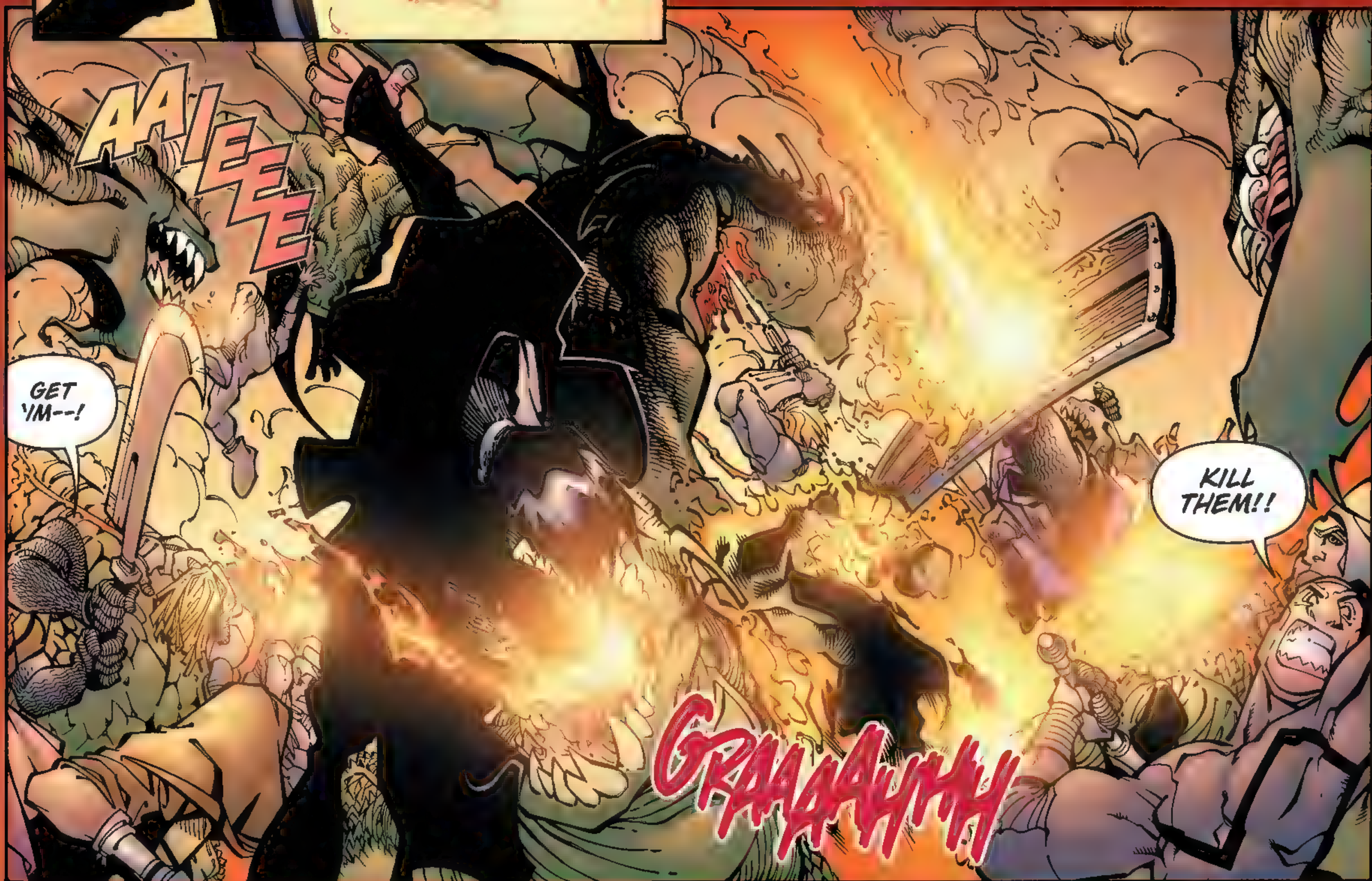
YES.

EKIMUS--!

LET HIM
GO, ALEX.
THIS IS HIS
BATTLE.



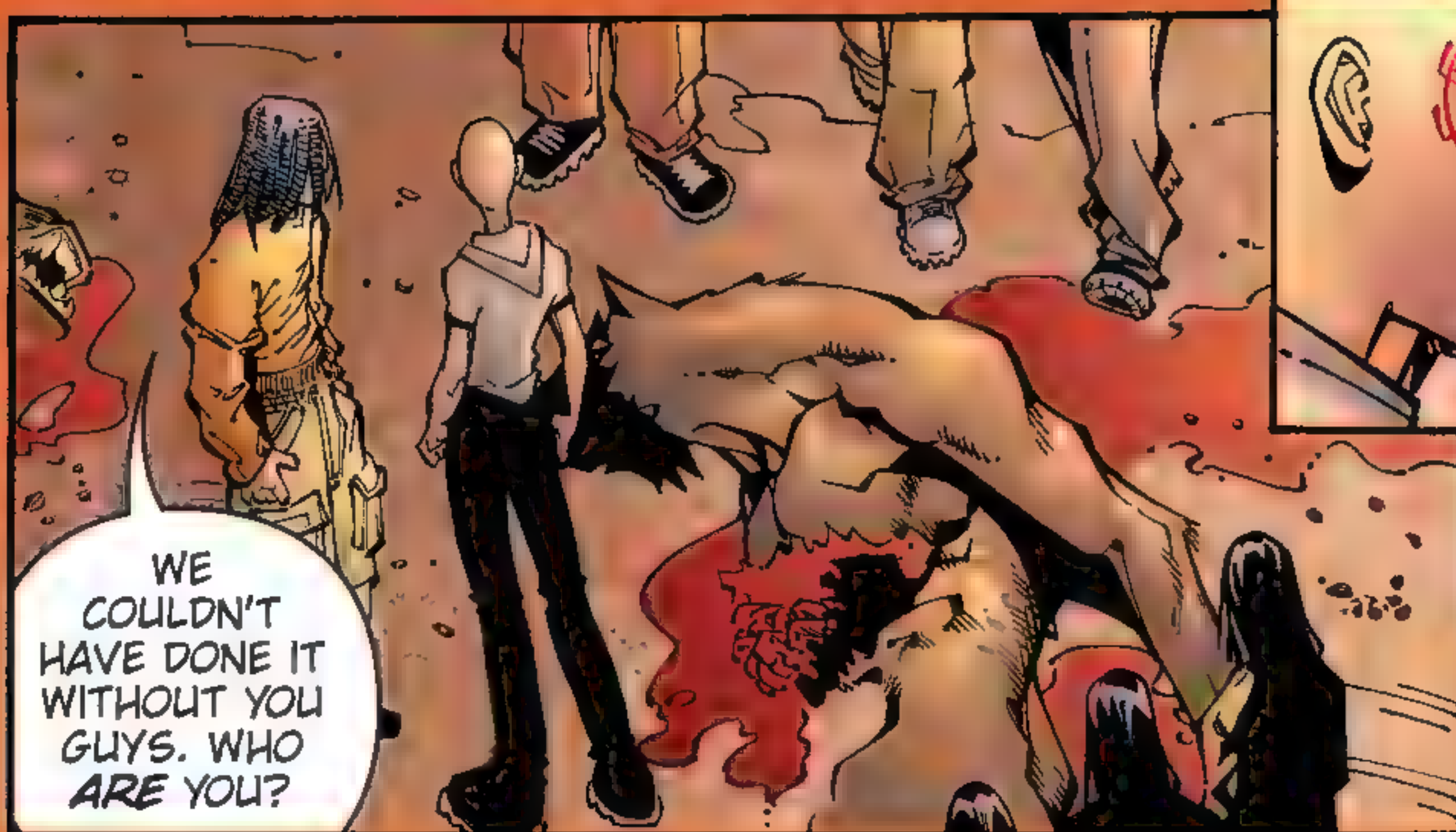
ROOOOAAAARRR



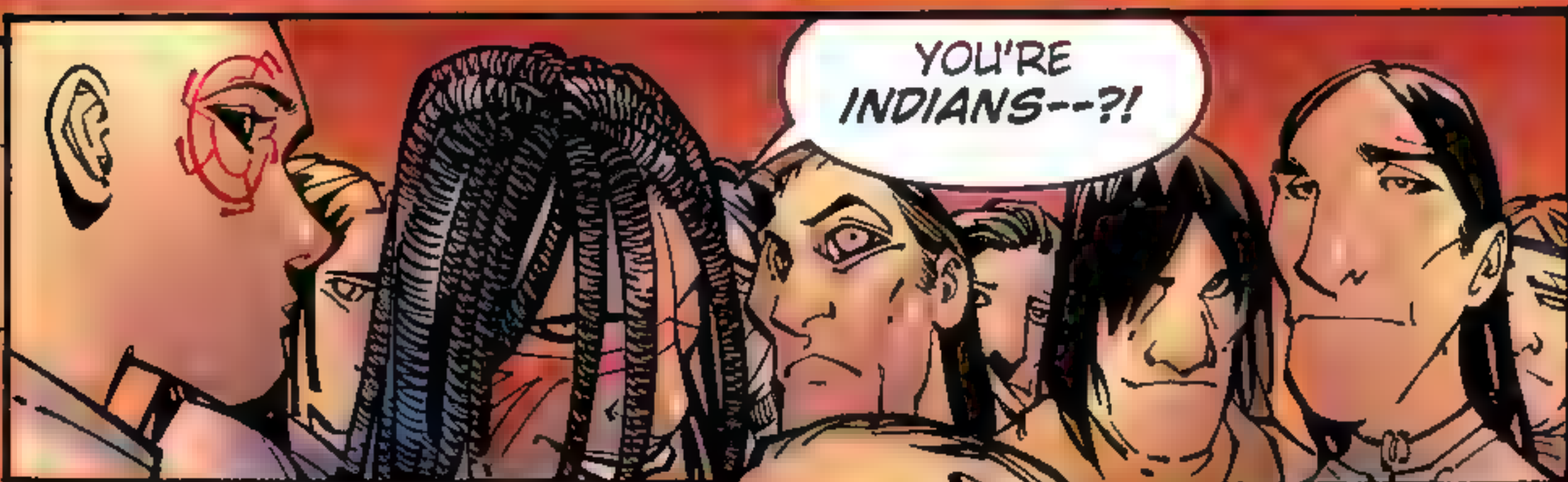
GET
'IM--!

KILL
THEM!!

GRAAAHHH



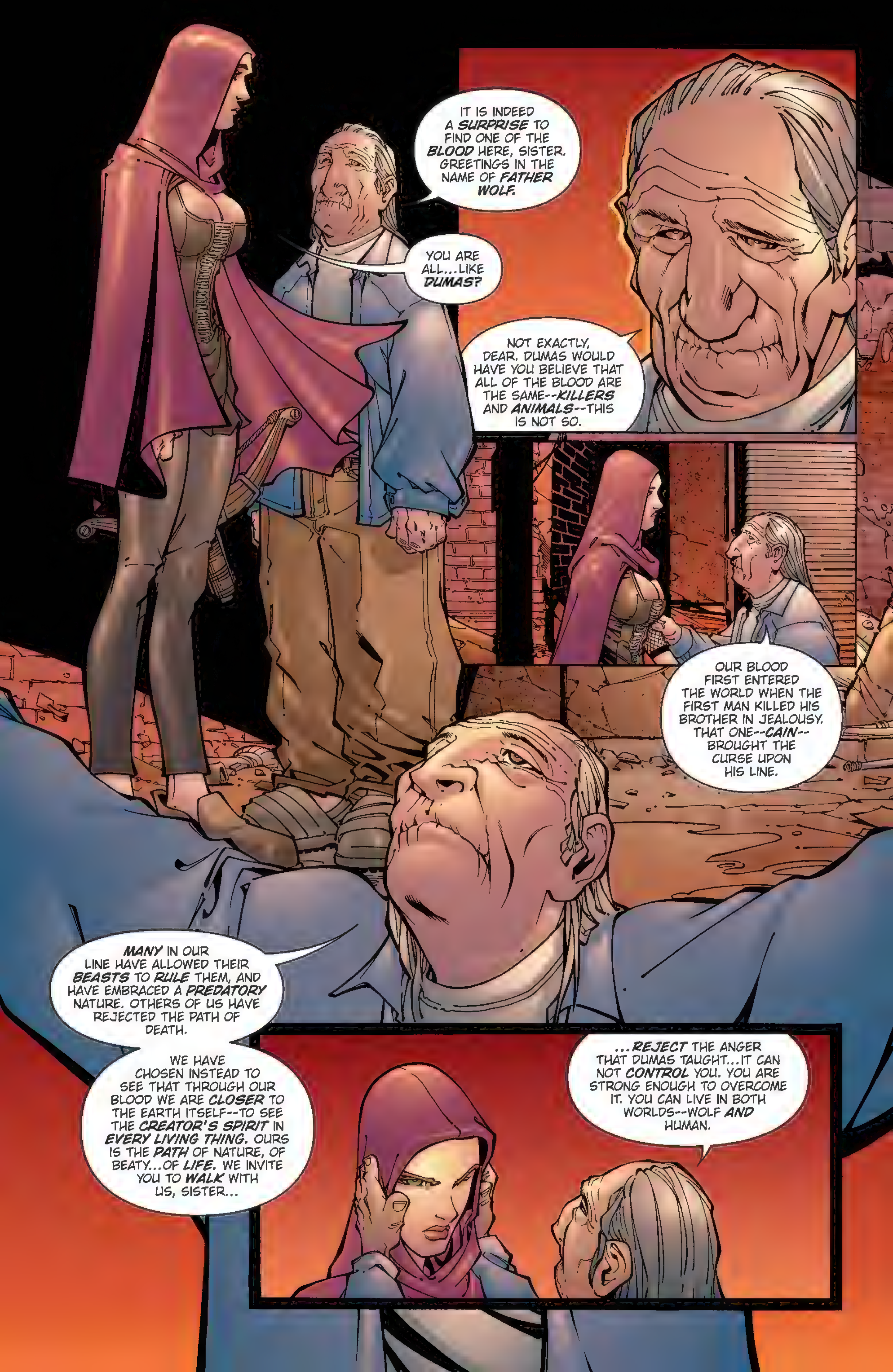
WE
COULDN'T
HAVE DONE IT
WITHOUT YOU
GUYS. WHO
ARE YOU?



YOU'RE
INDIANS--?!

YES, BROTHER.
WE ARE THE
MIK-MAQ, FROM
CANADA.

WE ARE
HERE TO AID
GLOOSCAP--
ST. GEORGE--
IN DESTROYING
THE
SERPENTS!



IT IS INDEED
A **SURPRISE** TO
FIND ONE OF THE
BLOOD HERE, SISTER.
GREETINGS IN THE
NAME OF **FATHER**
WOLF.

YOU ARE
ALL...LIKE
DUMAS?

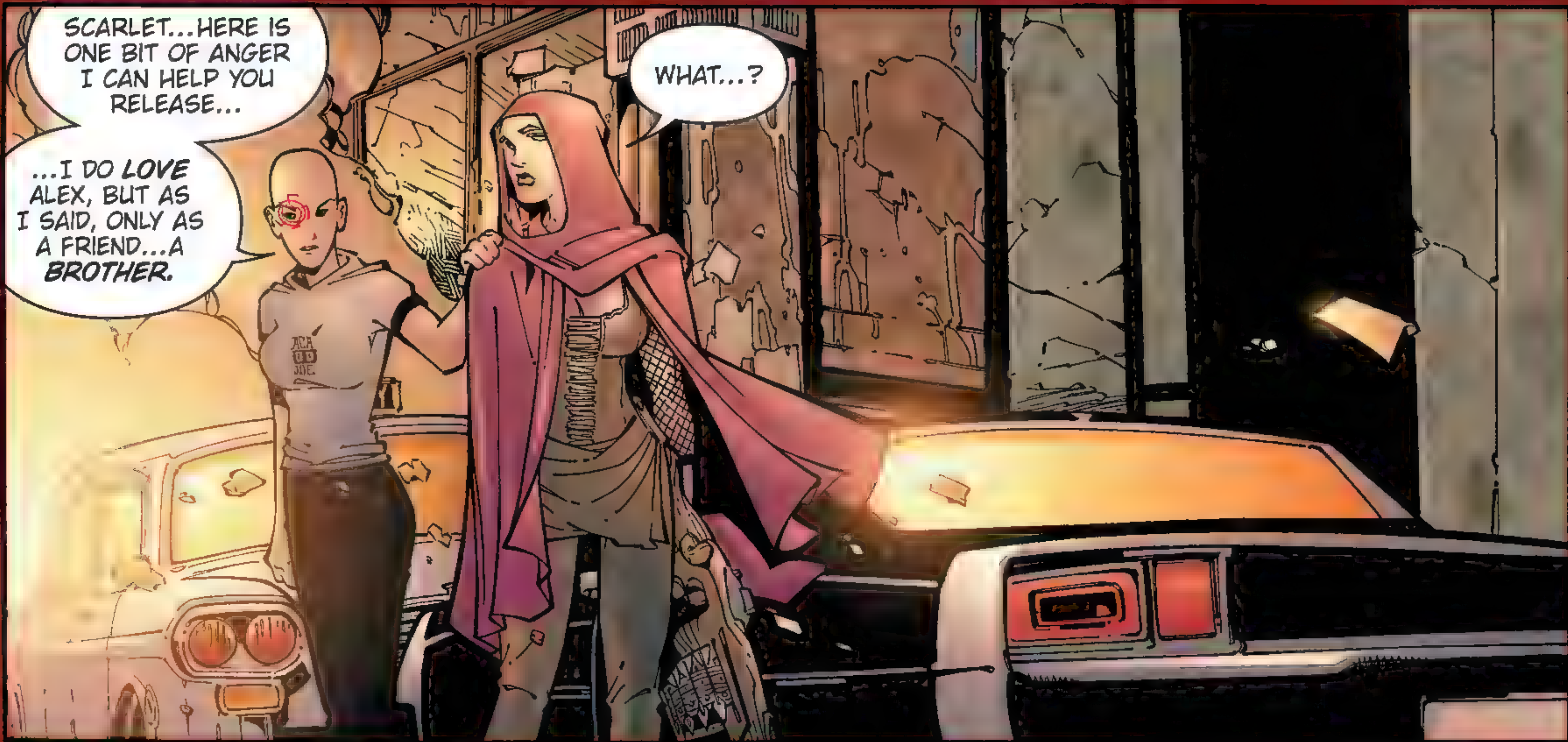
NOT EXACTLY,
DEAR. **DUMAS** WOULD
HAVE YOU BELIEVE THAT
ALL OF THE **BLOOD** ARE
THE SAME--**KILLERS**
AND **ANIMALS**--THIS
IS NOT SO.

OUR **BLOOD**
FIRST ENTERED
THE WORLD WHEN THE
FIRST MAN KILLED HIS
BROTHER IN JEALOUSY.
THAT ONE--**CAIN**--
BROUGHT THE
CURSE UPON
HIS LINE.

MANY IN OUR
LINE HAVE ALLOWED THEIR
BEASTS TO **RULE** THEM, AND
HAVE EMBRACED A **PREDATORY**
NATURE. OTHERS OF US HAVE
REJECTED THE PATH OF
DEATH.

WE HAVE
CHOSEN INSTEAD TO
SEE THAT THROUGH OUR
BLOOD WE ARE **CLOSER** TO
THE EARTH ITSELF--TO SEE
THE **CREATOR'S SPIRIT** IN
EVERY LIVING THING. OURS
IS THE **PATH OF NATURE**, OF
BEAUTY...OF **LIFE**. WE INVITE
YOU TO **WALK** WITH
US, SISTER...

...**REJECT** THE ANGER
THAT **DUMAS** TAUGHT...IT CAN
NOT **CONTROL** YOU. YOU ARE
STRONG ENOUGH TO **OVERCOME**
IT. YOU CAN LIVE IN BOTH
WORLDS--**WOLF AND**
HUMAN.



SCARLET...HERE IS ONE BIT OF ANGER I CAN HELP YOU RELEASE...

...I DO LOVE ALEX, BUT AS I SAID, ONLY AS A FRIEND...A BROTHER.

WHAT...?

I AM SAYING THAT I HAVE NO DESIRE TO TAKE ALEX AWAY FROM YOU.

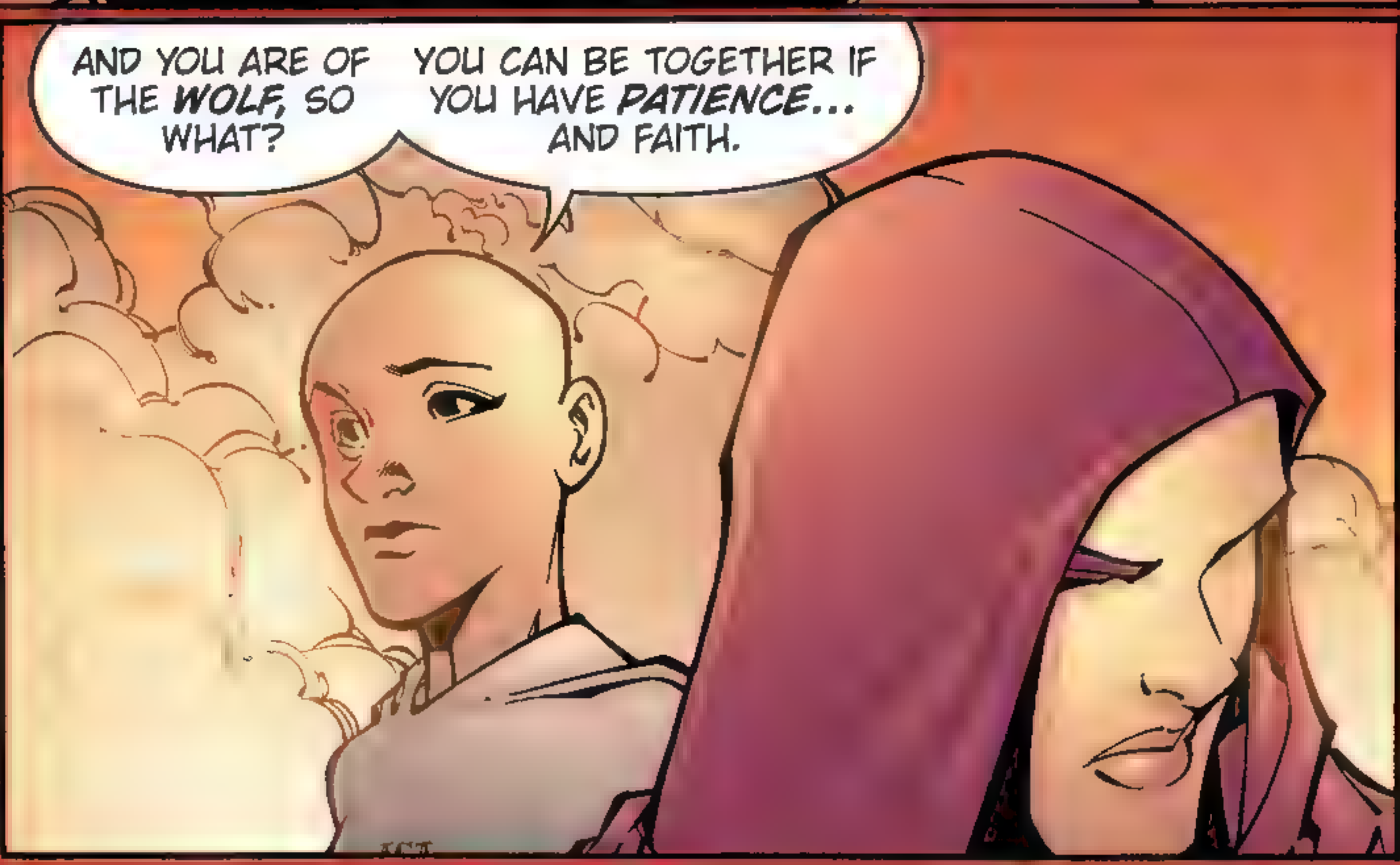
I KNOW TOO WELL THE PAIN OF LOST LOVE--THERE IS ONE I CAN NEVER HAVE.

WAIT-- I DON'T WANT ALEX AS A LOVER...



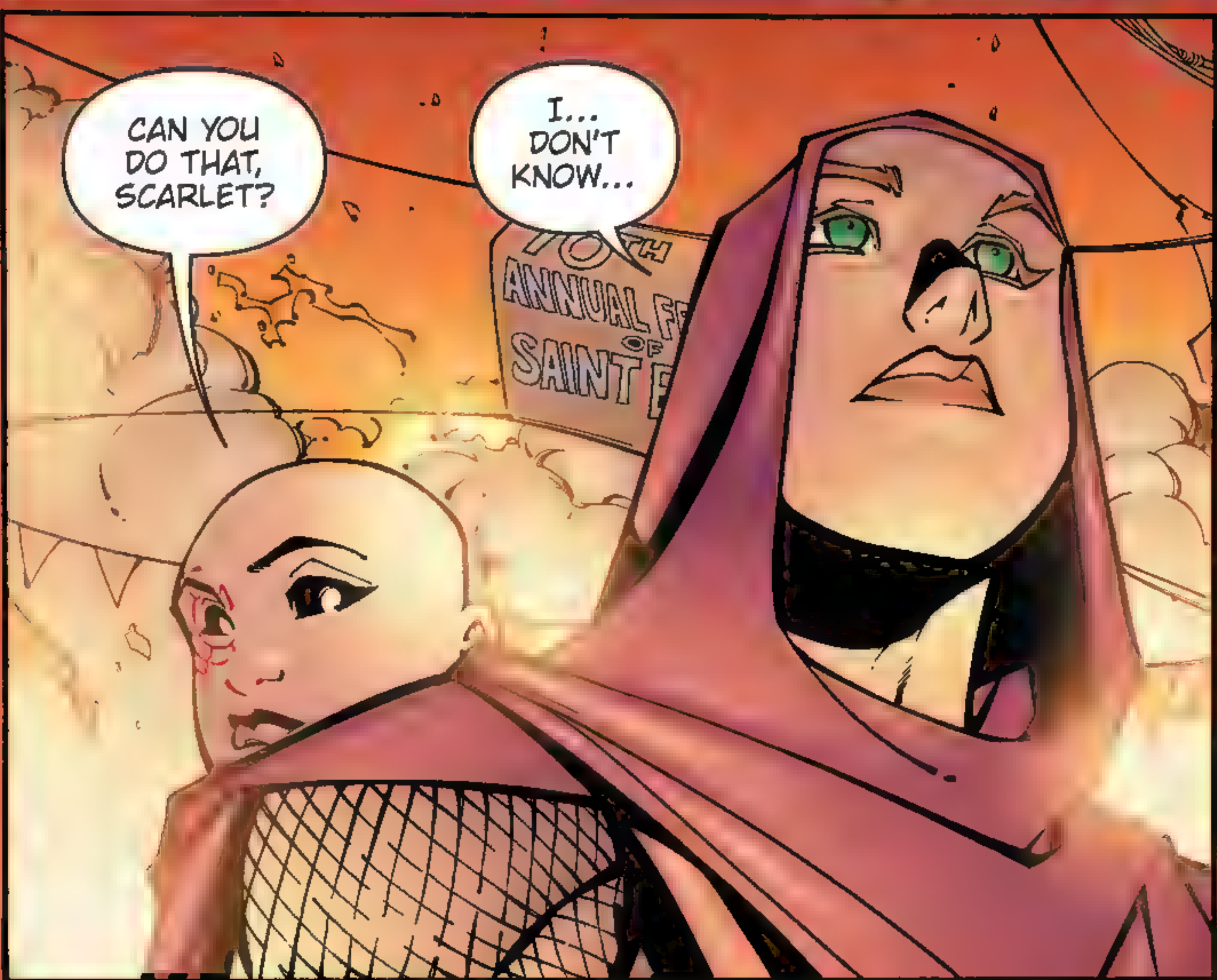
WE BOTH KNOW OTHERWISE, DON'T WE, SCARLET? SOMEDAY, YOU TWO WILL BE TOGETHER...

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE-- HE IS A VAMPIRE!



AND YOU ARE OF THE WOLF, SO WHAT?

YOU CAN BE TOGETHER IF YOU HAVE PATIENCE... AND FAITH.



CAN YOU DO THAT, SCARLET?

I... DON'T KNOW...

AT THE MUSIEM, THE BATTLE
IS TERRIBLE... AND FOR
MANY, FINAL...



DRAGON'S
BLOOD IS EVEN
BETTER
FRESH!

YAAAAHHH--!!

THERE'LL
BE PLENTY BEFORE
WE'RE THROUGH--
BUT MUCH OF OURS
SPILLS AS WELL...

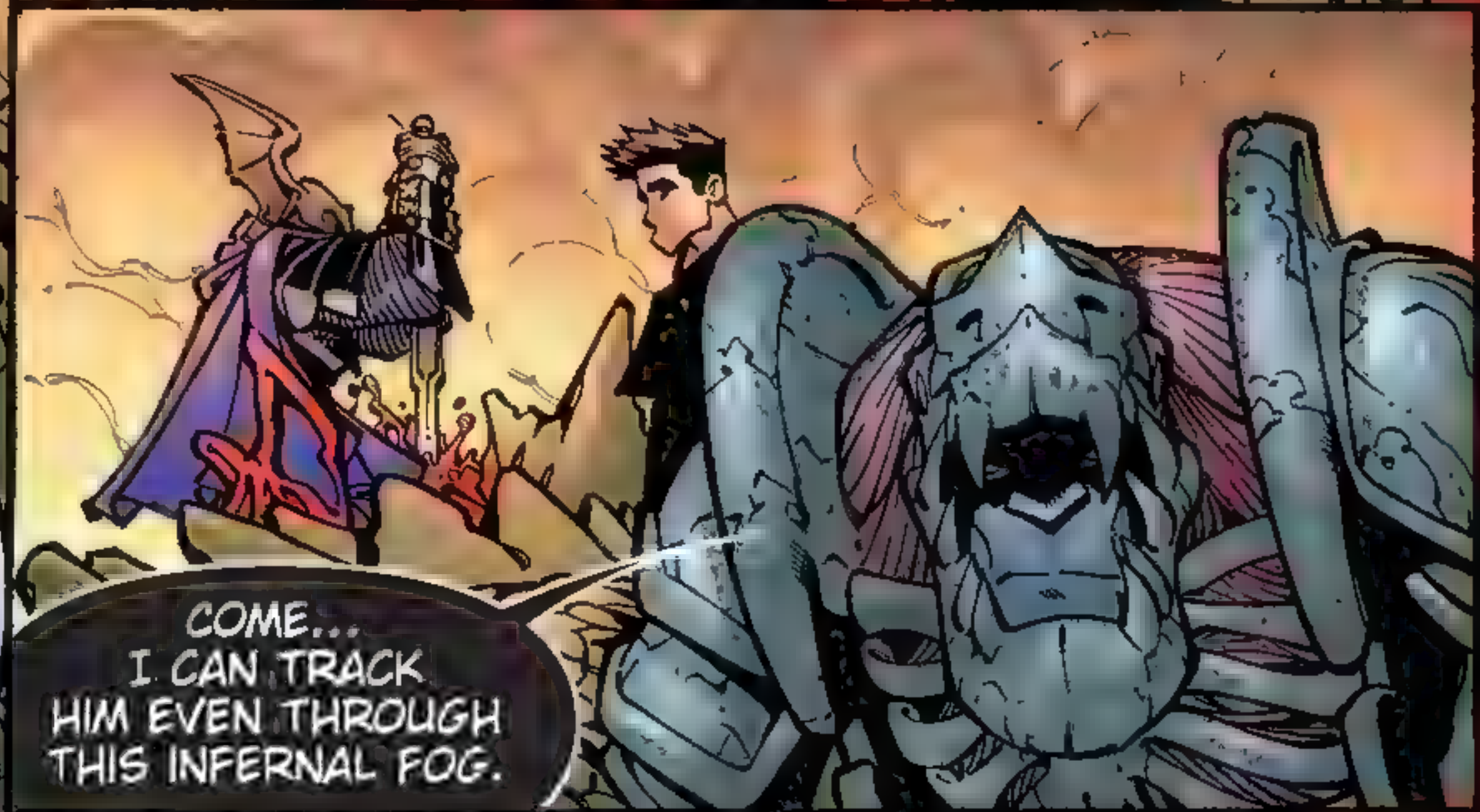
EKIMUS--!





EKIMUS--
IS SAPHA...?

NO. THAT
ONE SKULKED
AWAY AND SICKED
THESE PESTS
ON ME.

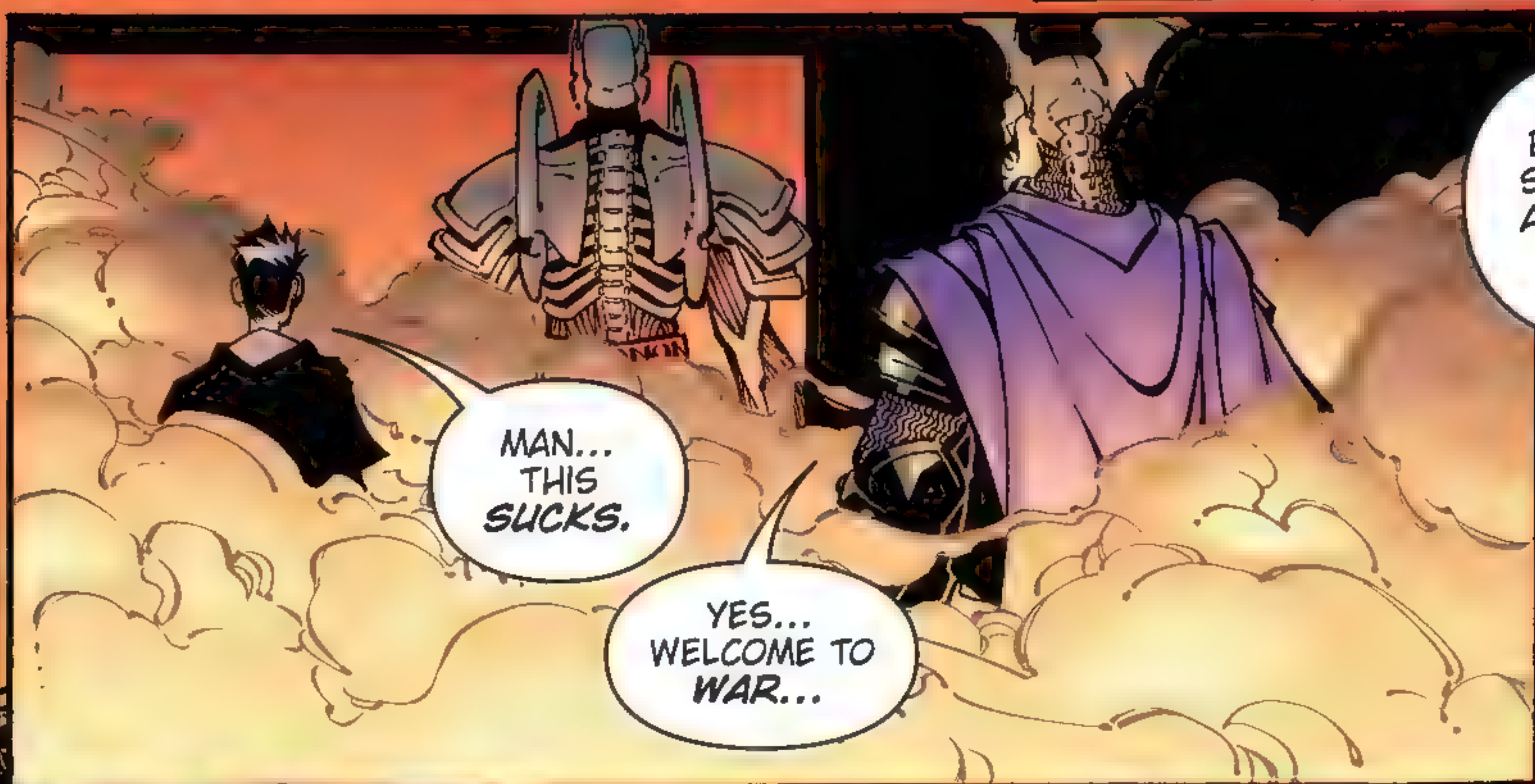


COME...
I CAN TRACK
HIM EVEN THROUGH
THIS INFERNAL FOG.



UM, GUYS--
WHAT ABOUT THE
OTHERS?

THEY
KNEW THE RISKS,
ALEX, AND ARE BEYOND
OUR HELP ANYWAY. COME...



MAN...
THIS
SUCKS.

YES...
WELCOME TO
WAR...

IT IS ALL
BUT OVER...
SOON WE WILL
ALL HAVE OUR
HEART'S
DESIRE.

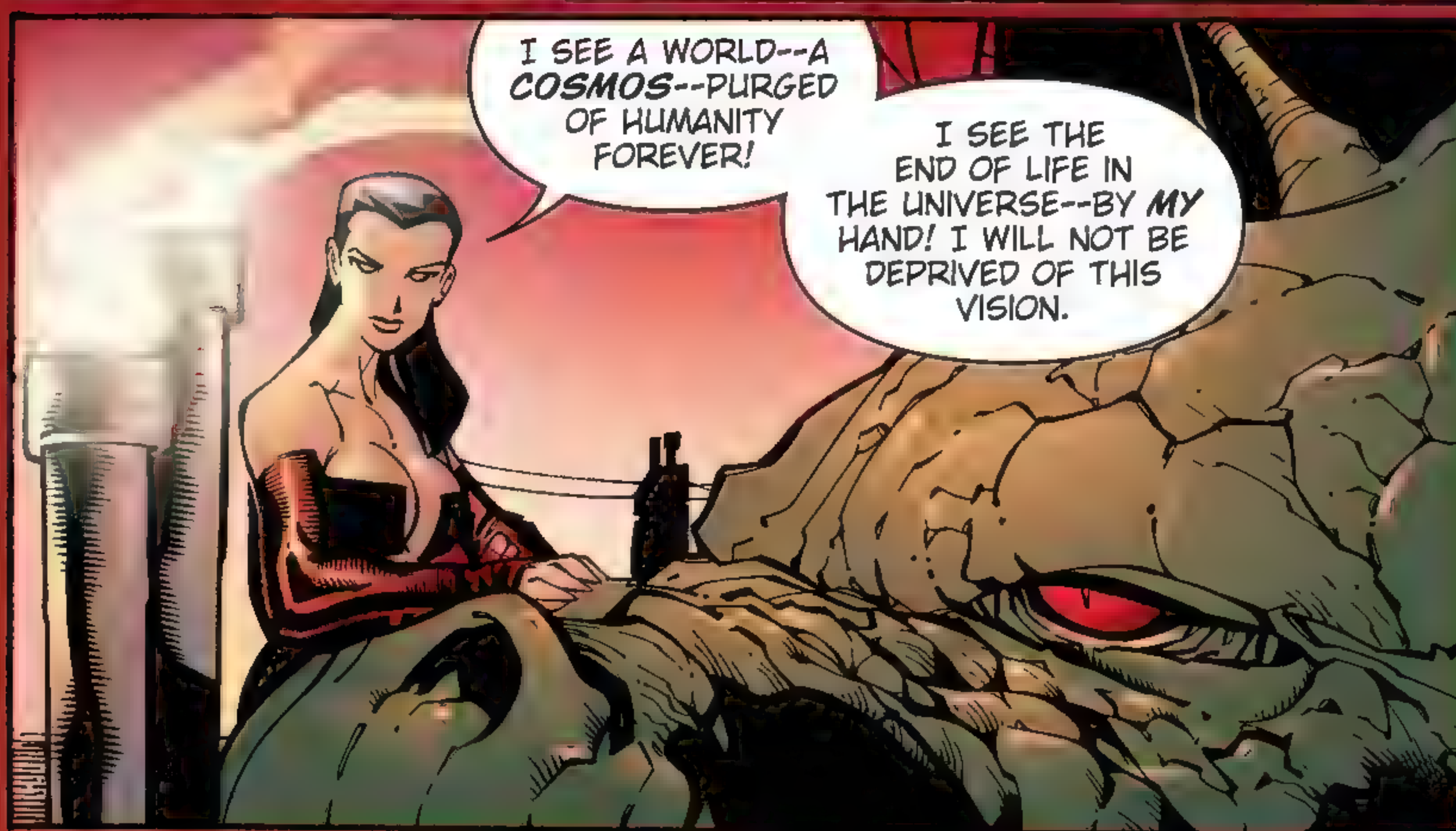




THE **CHOSEN ONE** AND HIS MASTER HAVE FAILED. THEY FLEE LIKE COWARDS.

I HAD THOUGHT THE GRIGORI FINISHED ONCE BEFORE, RECALL...

I DON'T CARE. HE CAN DO NOTHING TO STOP ME.



I SEE A WORLD--A **COSMOS**--PURGED OF HUMANITY FOREVER!

I SEE THE END OF LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE--BY MY HAND! I WILL NOT BE DEPRIVED OF THIS VISION.



A **DECIMATED** UNIVERSE--THIS IS YOUR HEART'S DESIRE...?



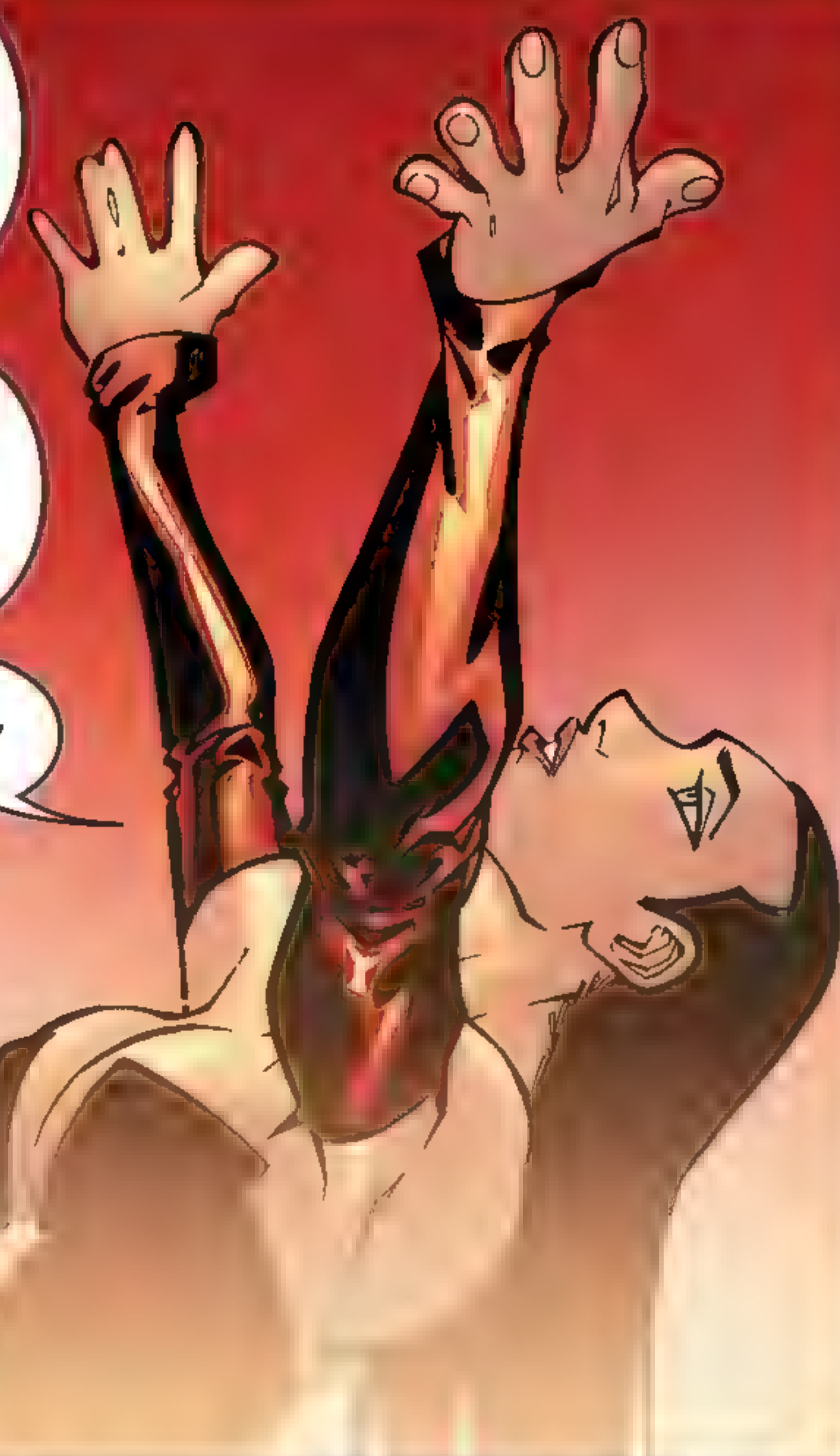
MY DEAR, SINCE THE MOMENT I WAS EXPELLED FROM EDEN AND FORCED TO WANDER ALONE IN THE WASTELAND, I HAVE DESIRED **NOTHING** ELSE.

FROM AFAR, AND FOREVER DENIED A SHARE, I WATCHED THE CURSED HUMANS RECEIVE ALL THE BLESSINGS THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN MINE...

NOW IT IS I WHO WILL DO THE **DENYING!** I WILL DENY EVERY LAST HUMAN SOUL THE RIGHT TO **LIVE!**

I WILL DENY BOTH GODS AND SATAN THEIR PAWNS! NO **PEOPLE**, NO BELIEF--

NO **EXISTENCE!!!**





I WILL **STRIP BARE**
THE TREE OF LIFE! PARADISE
WILL BE BARREN--**HEAVEN**
AND **HELL** WILL BE
DESERTED!

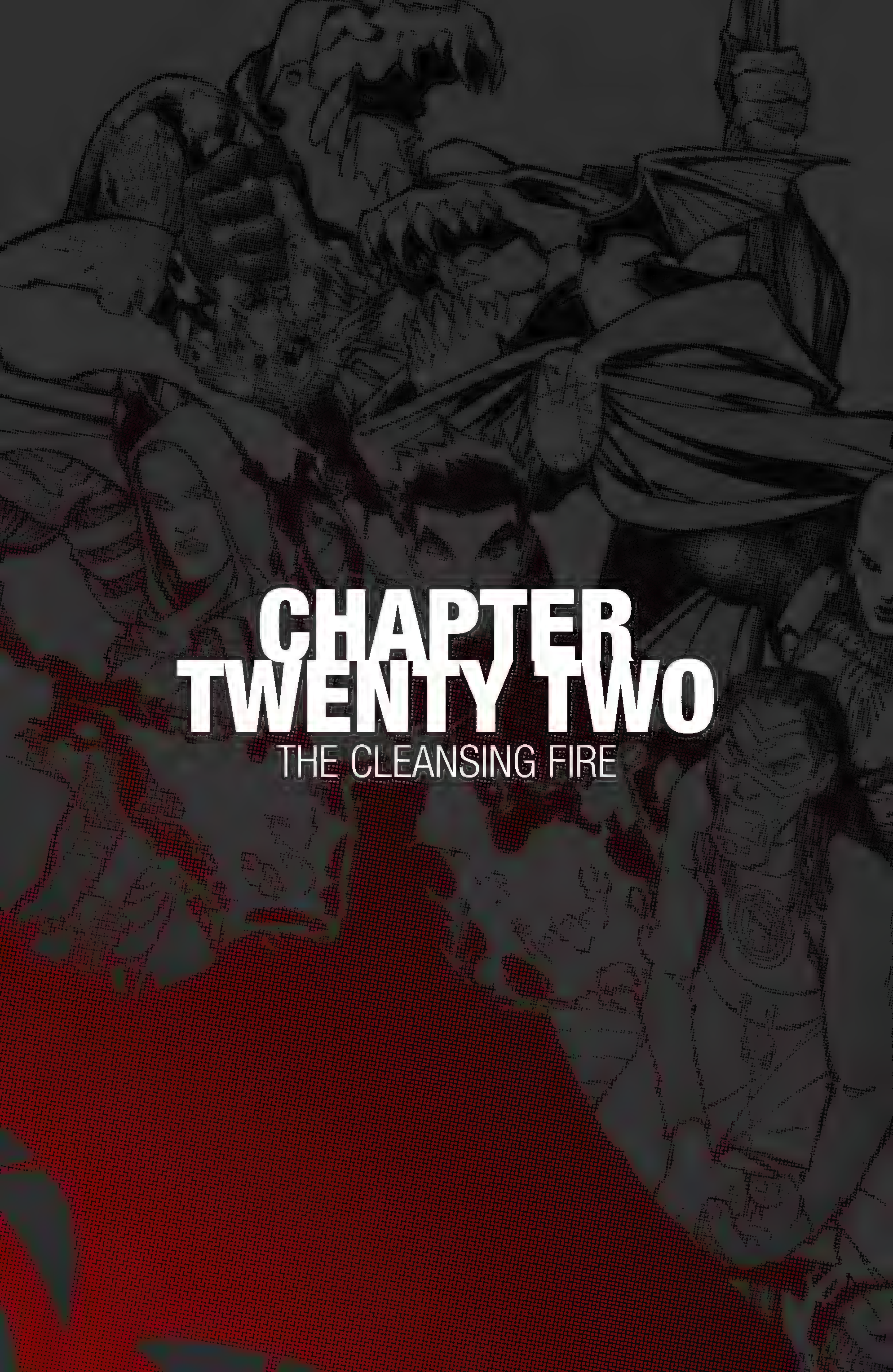


THE **EARTH--**
THE **UNIVERSE--**
WILL FINALLY BE
PURIFIED!

THEN I
WILL **REMAKE**
IT--IN MY
IMAGE!







CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

THE CLEANSING FIRE



NEW YORK, A CITY
UNDER SIEGE.

THE DRAGONS, HARBINGERS OF
ARMAGEDDON, HAVE DECIDED TO
WRENCH POSSESSION OF THE
EARTH FROM THE FINGERS OF
MANKIND...

...AND HAVE NEARLY
SUCCEEDED. SOON THOSE
HUMAN FINGERS WILL BE
COOL AND DEAD.

AND SEEMINGLY, THERE
ARE NO CREATURES ON
THE PLANET THAT CAN
STOP THE RENEGADE
SERPENTS.

SAVE ONE PERHAPS...
BUT HE AND HIS KIND ARE
RESTRAINED FROM ACTIVE
INTERVENTION.

THIS ONE HAS WITNESSED
MANY A NEAR-ARMAGEDDON
WHEN JERICO FELL, WHEN
THE ROMANS BURNED
JERUSALEM, WHEN ROME
ITSELF FELL TO THE
FLAMES. HE WAS THERE.

AS AN ARCHANGEL,
HE IS DUTY-BOUND TO BE
PRESENT AT THE WORLD'S
END. RAPHAEL WONDERS
IF--FINALLY--THAT DAY
HAS COME.

FROM THIS LOFTY
PERCH, IT APPEARS
THAT IT MIGHT BE...

IS THIS THE
CURTAIN, MICHAEL?
WILL LISSETH'S
PLAN TO RULE
CREATION SUCCEED?

IT IS TOO
SOON TO SAY,
RAPHAEL...ALL
WE CAN DO IS
WAIT.

WAITING.
THE ANGEL'S
LOT.



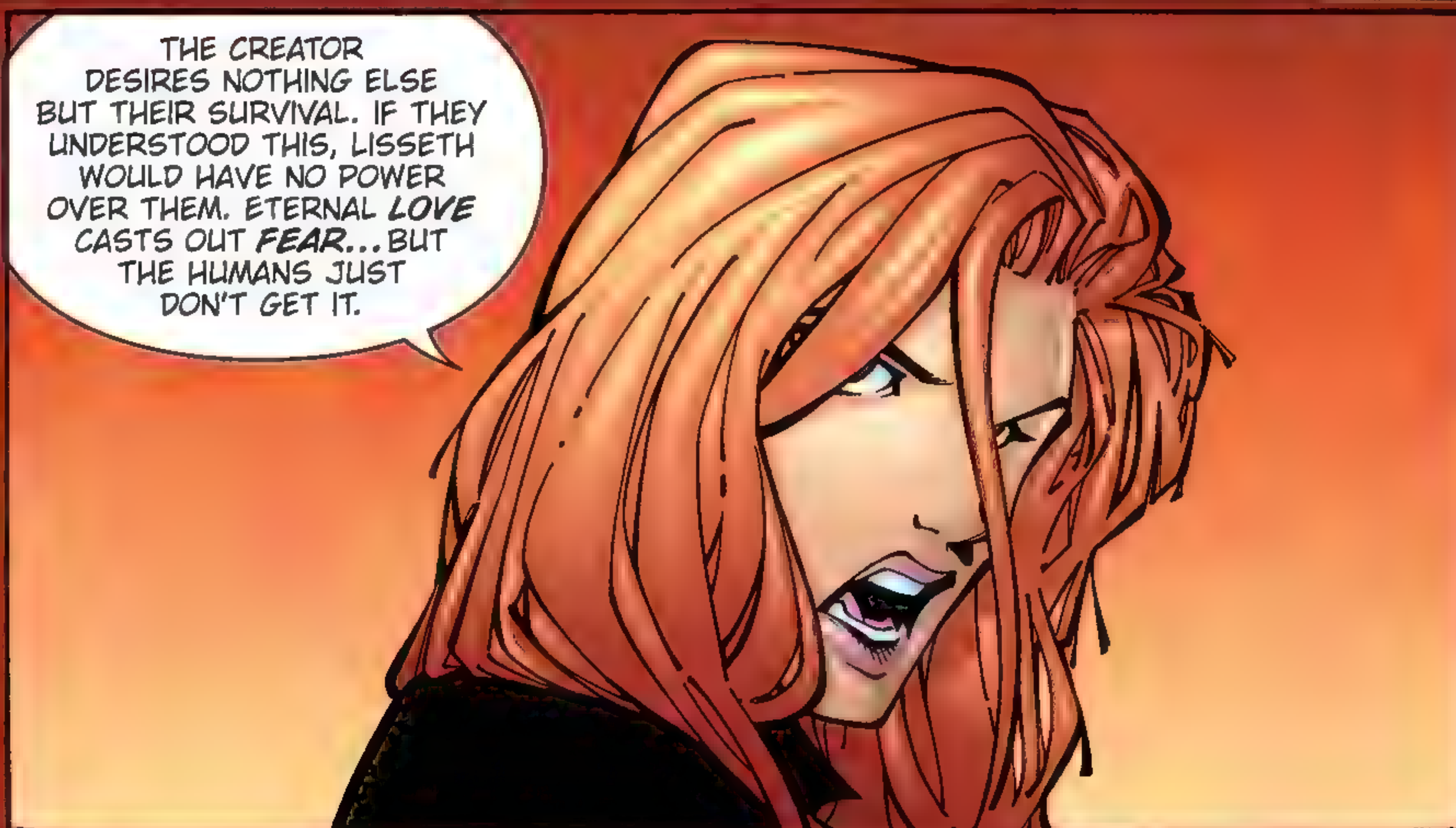
WE MAY NOT NEED TO WAIT LONG, THE OTHERS ARE DRAWN HERE TOO. WHAT SAY YOU, REMIEL? HAVE YOU ORDERS TO SOUND THE FINAL TRUMP?

NO. BUT IN A TIME SUCH AS *THIS*, I MUST BE *READY*.

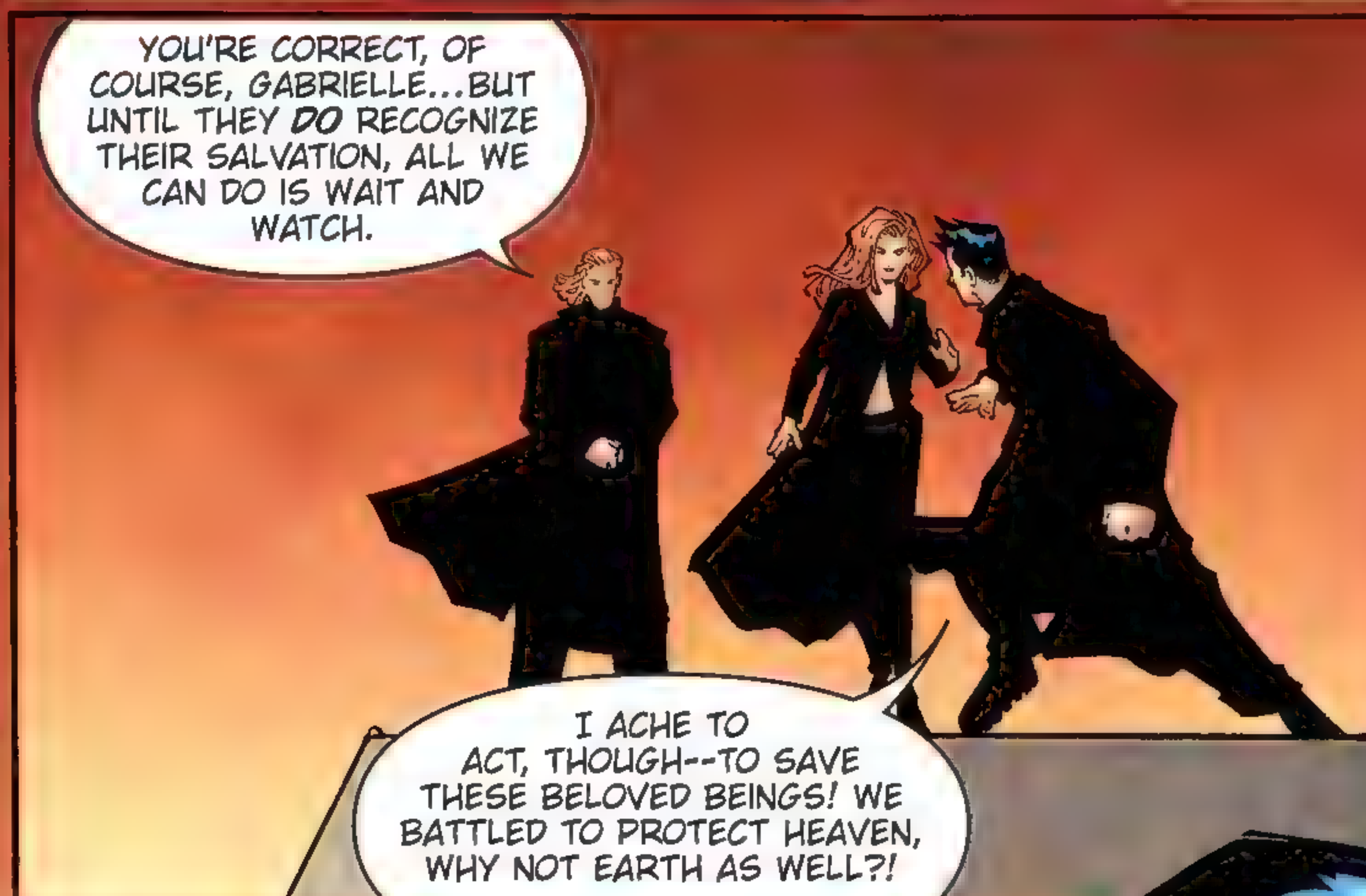


YES, THOUGH WORD IS THAT THE DRAGONS IN LONDON AND TOKYO HAVE BEEN ROUTED.

PERHAPS THE CREATOR WILL YET ALLOW THE HUMANS TO SURVIVE.



THE CREATOR DESIRES NOTHING ELSE BUT THEIR SURVIVAL. IF THEY UNDERSTOOD THIS, LISSETH WOULD HAVE NO POWER OVER THEM. ETERNAL LOVE CASTS OUT *FEAR*... BUT THE HUMANS JUST DON'T GET IT.



YOU'RE CORRECT, OF COURSE, GABRIELLE... BUT UNTIL THEY *DO* RECOGNIZE THEIR SALVATION, ALL WE CAN DO IS WAIT AND WATCH.

I ACHIEVE TO ACT, THOUGH--TO SAVE THESE BELOVED BEINGS! WE BATTLED TO PROTECT HEAVEN, WHY NOT EARTH AS WELL?!

RAPHAEL, HAVE *FAITH*. HOW CAN THEY HOPE IF *WE* CANNOT? IF WE HAVE DONE RIGHT IN OUR EONS OF GUARDIANSHIP, THEN WE HAVE ALREADY DONE OUR BEST TO PRESERVE HUMAN LIFE.



A WORLD WITHOUT THOSE
SELF-DIRECTED **MONKEYS**
ISN'T NECESSARILY A **BAD**
THING, Y'ASK ME.

NO ONE
ASKED,
ZARIEL.

WELL,
ANYWAY, SORRY
WE'RE LATE. **LOTS** OF
DEATHS OUT THERE
FOR US TO SORT OUT.

SOUND THE
FIRST BLAST,
REMIEL...

THAT'S
FINE. ZARIEL,
LIRIEL...IT'S GOOD
WE'RE ALL HERE.
IT'S **TIME** TO
BEGIN.

...THOUGH, I PRAY WE MAY
NEVER GET TO THE **FIFTH** AND
FINAL TRUMPET.

TROOOOOOOO

ISOLATED FROM THE CONTEXT
OF TOTAL DESTRUCTION, SOME
PARTS OF THE CITY APPEAR
SAFE...EVEN ATTRACTIVELY
QUIET...

...BUT THAT IS A
TRICK OF THE EYE...

...AN ILLUSION IN THE
MOONLIGHT.

FOR DEATH IS AS
CLOSE AS YOUR
NEXT BREATH...

...OR YOUR
LAST.

THE HUMANS HAD BEEN
HERDED TO THIS SPOT IN
CENTRAL PARK, WITH NO
IDEA WHY...

RAWWWR

NOW THEY
KNOW...

...THEY'RE TO
BE DRAGON
CHOW.

UNLESS THEIR
DESPERATE PRAYERS
ARE ANSWERED.

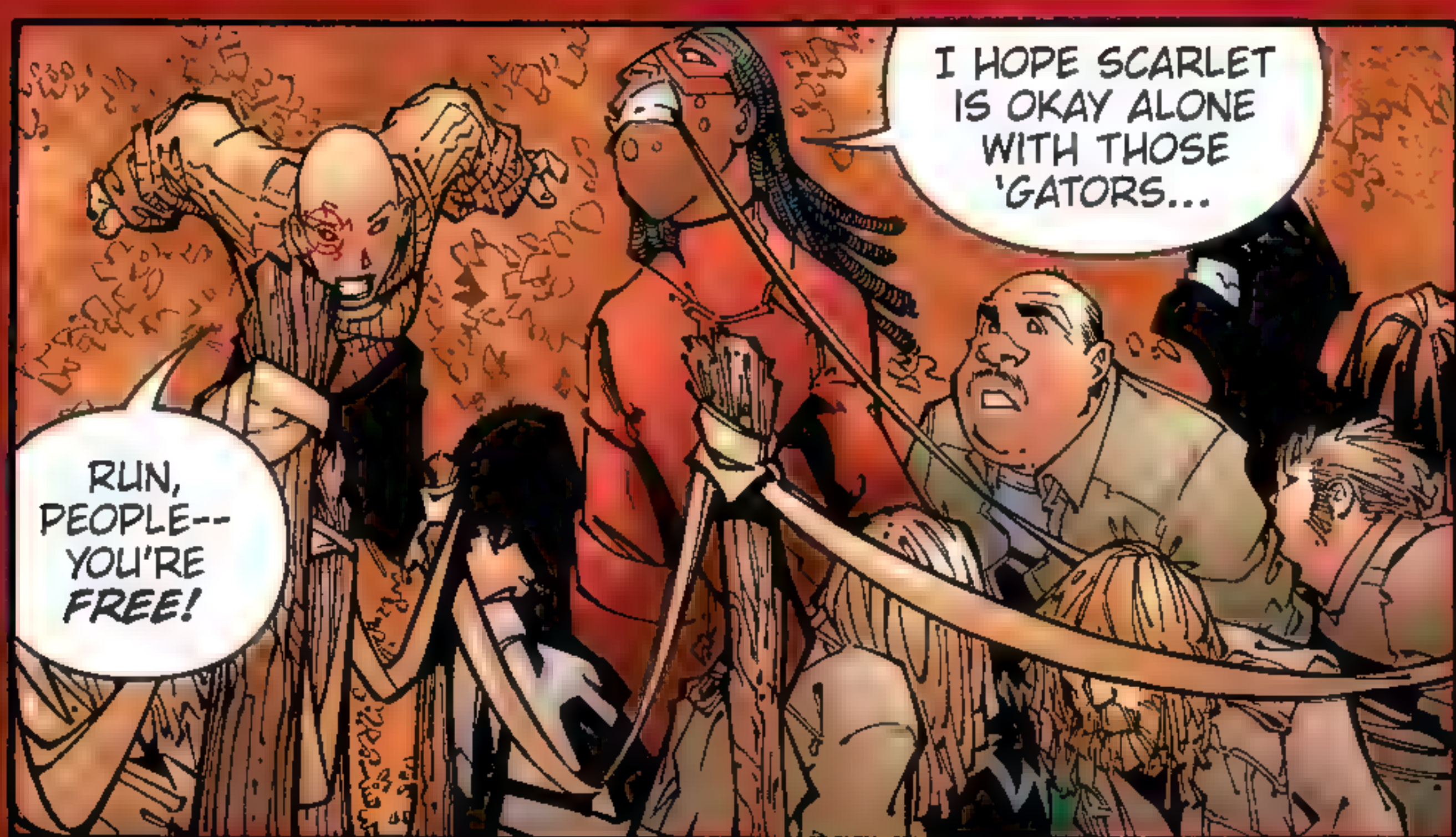
BONJOUR--?

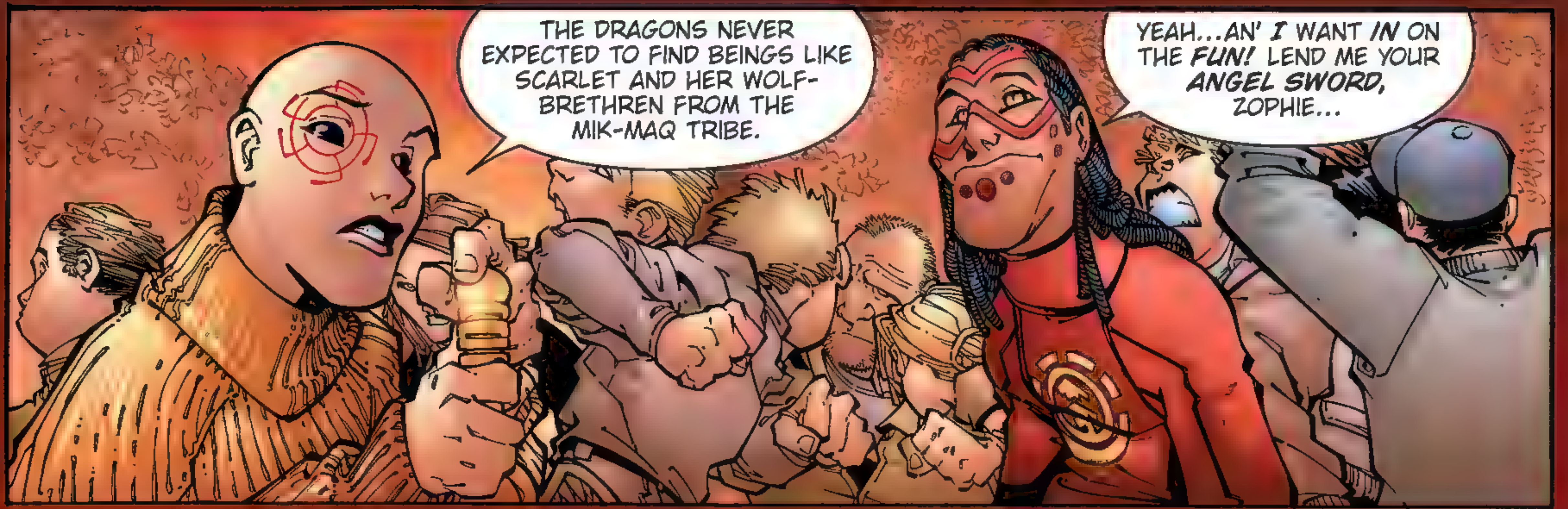
ARRRR
KXKXKX

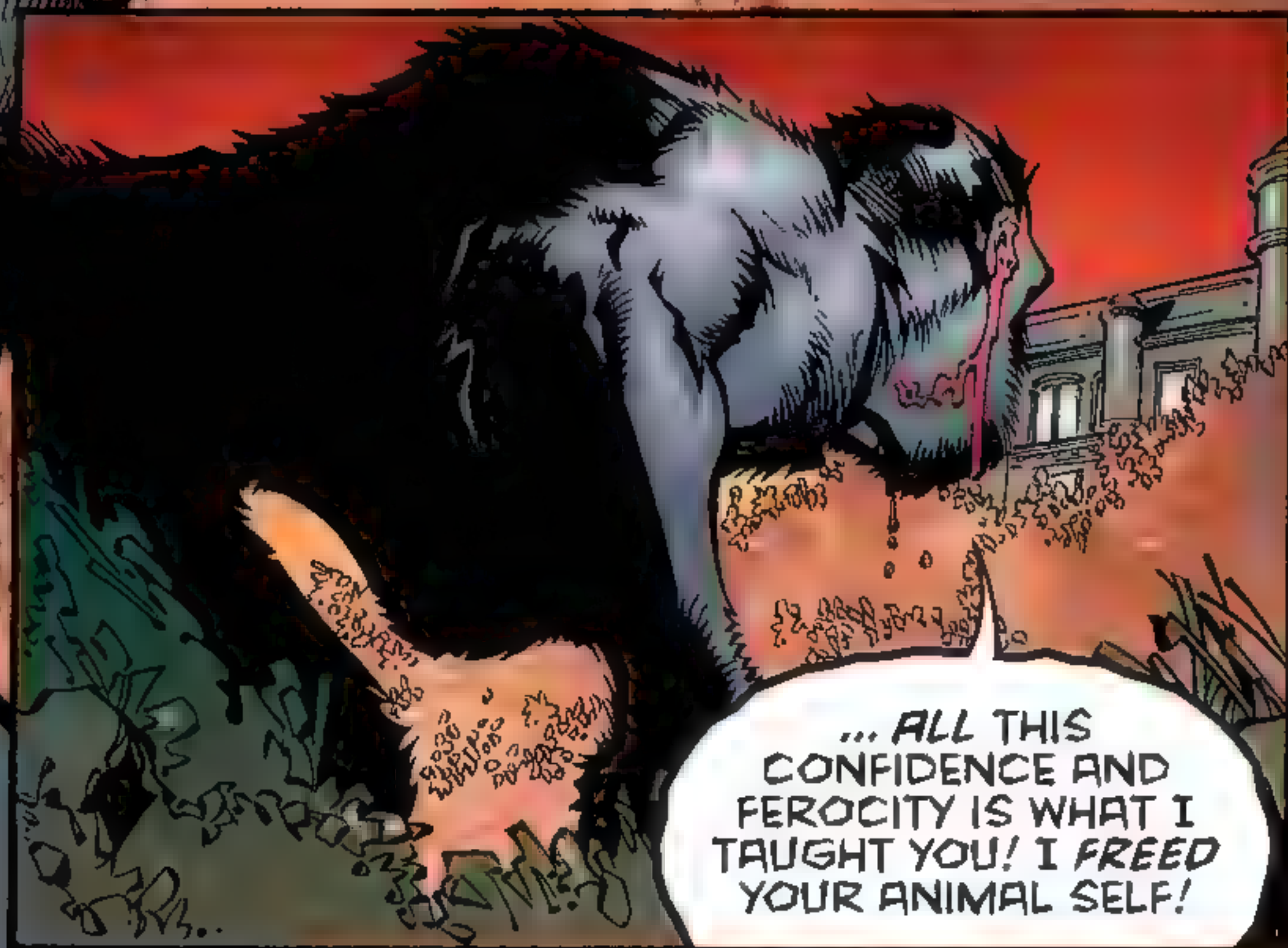
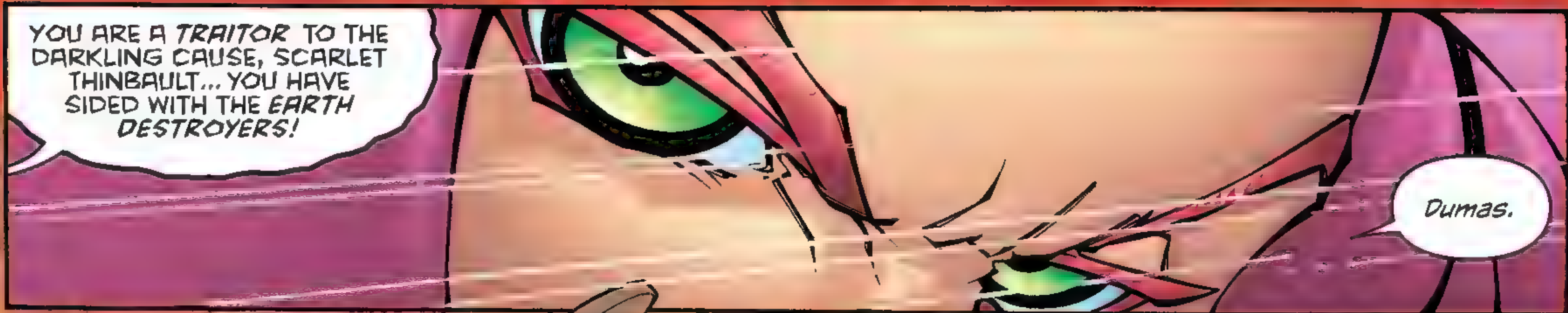
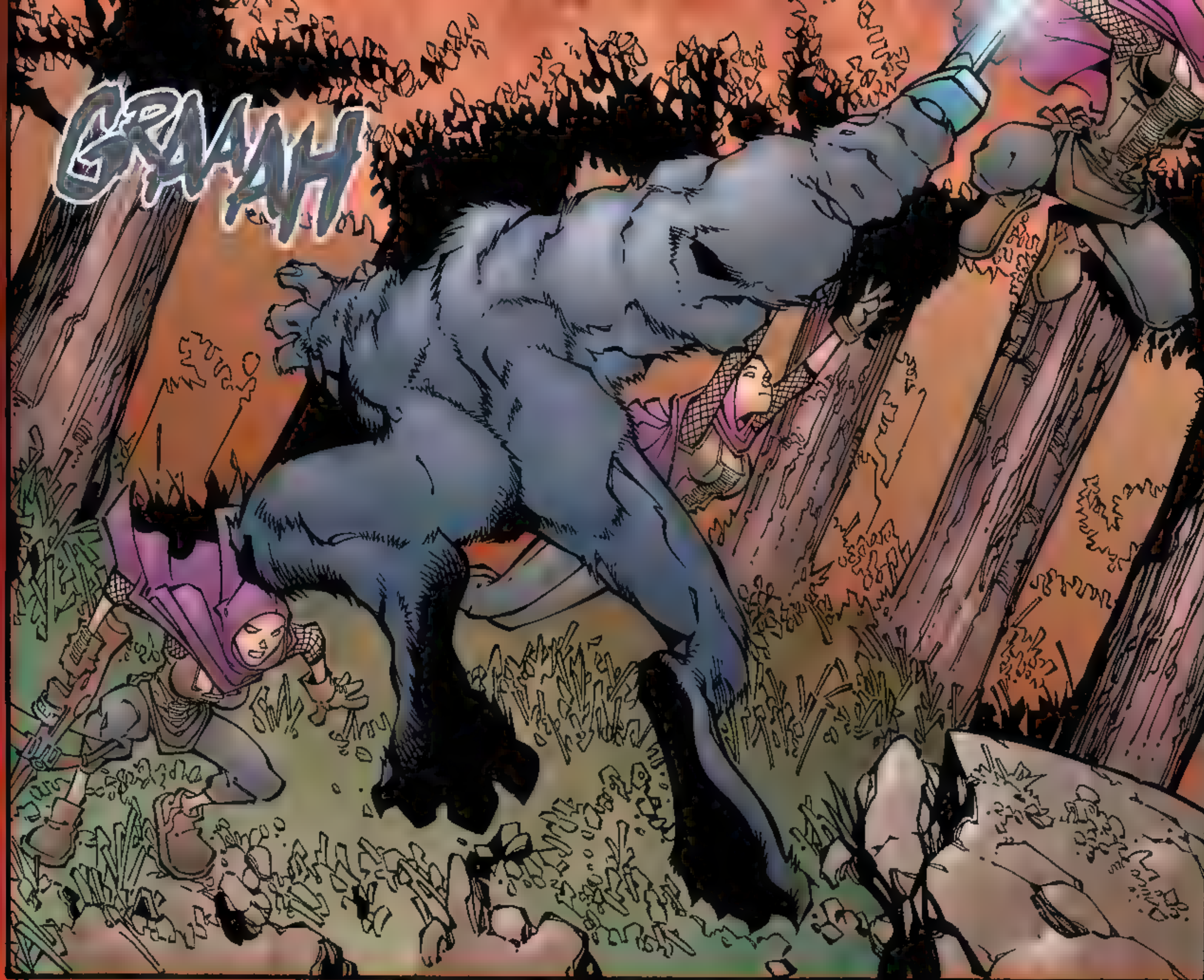


'ALLO, MONSIEUR SNAKE...

EAT THIS!









GOOD--MORE
FUN! LOOK OUT,
DOGGIES, YOU
GONNA GET
RIPPED!

YA-HOO!



JOE--
WE HAVE
MORE FURRED
FRIENDS...

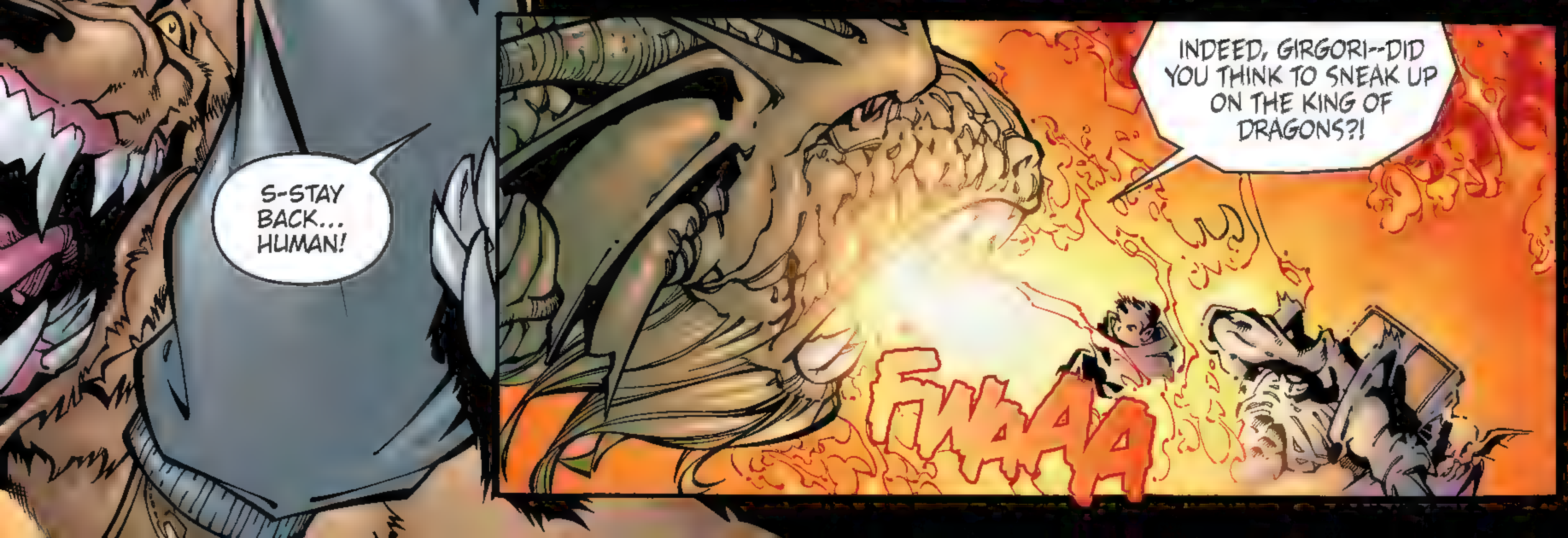
YOU HAVE
KILLED OUR
BROTHERS... NOW
YOU WILL PAY.

ELSEWHERE...



WEIRD FOG...
WHAT DOES
IT MEAN,
EKIMUS?

THIS IS
SAPHA'S
DOING,
ALEX...



S-STAY
BACK...
HUMAN!

INDEED, GIRGORI--DID
YOU THINK TO SNEAK UP
ON THE KING OF
DRAGONS?!

FWAAA



STAY BACK,
ALEX--MY ARMOR
PROTECTS ME!

LOOKS LIKE
SAPHA'S BAD
BREATH IS
TOUGHER!



GET BEHIND MY
SHIELD IT IS MADE
TO WITHSTAND
DRAGON-FIRE!



SAPHA SEEMS
MORE POWERFUL THAN
EVER, ST. GEORGE... I
WONDER IF ANYTHING
CAN STAND AGAINST
HIM...

EKIMUS,
YOUR
ARM--?!



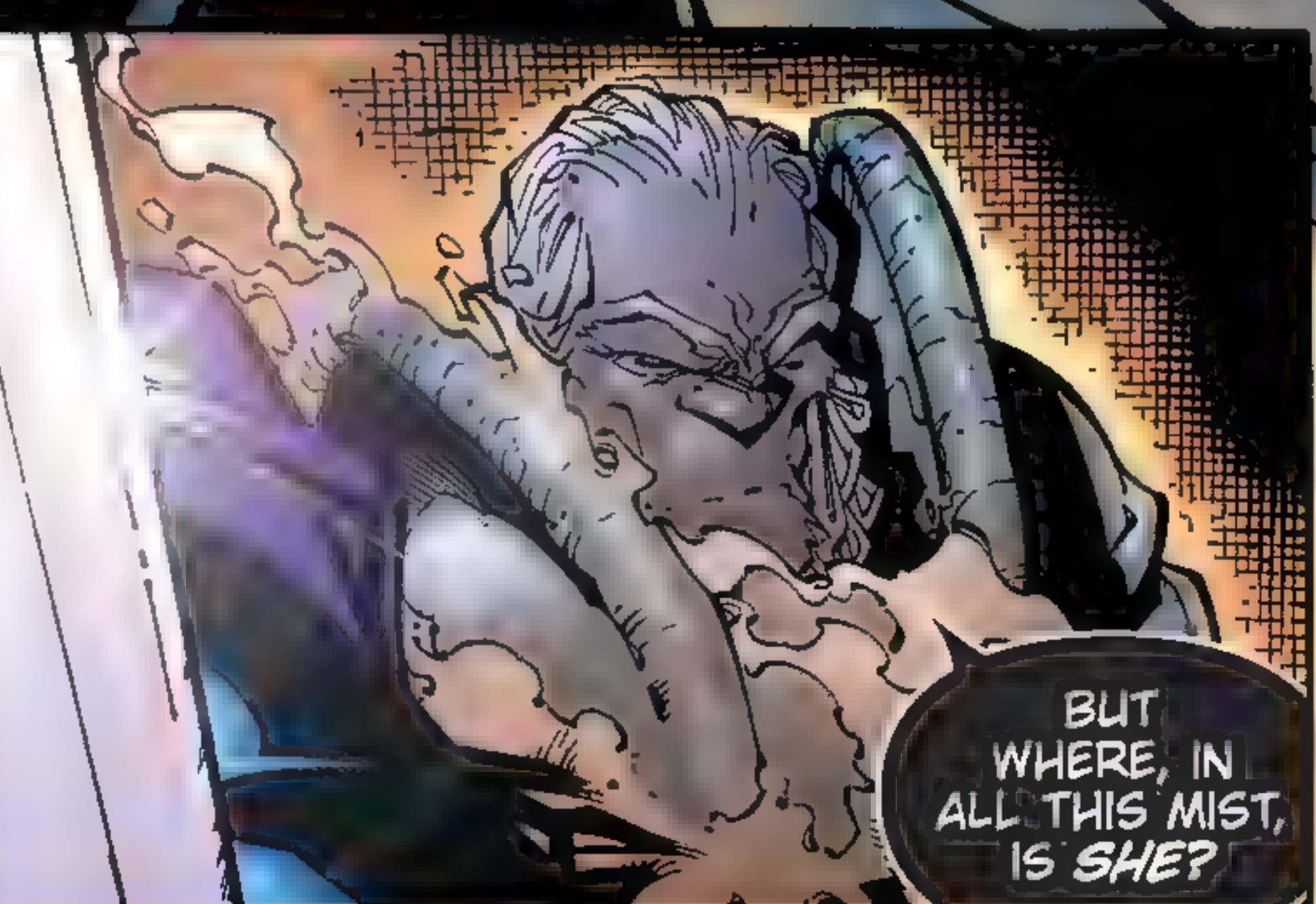
IT IS
NOTHING.

WELL,
I'M NOT STANDING
STILL ANY LONGER--
SAPHA IS *MINE*!

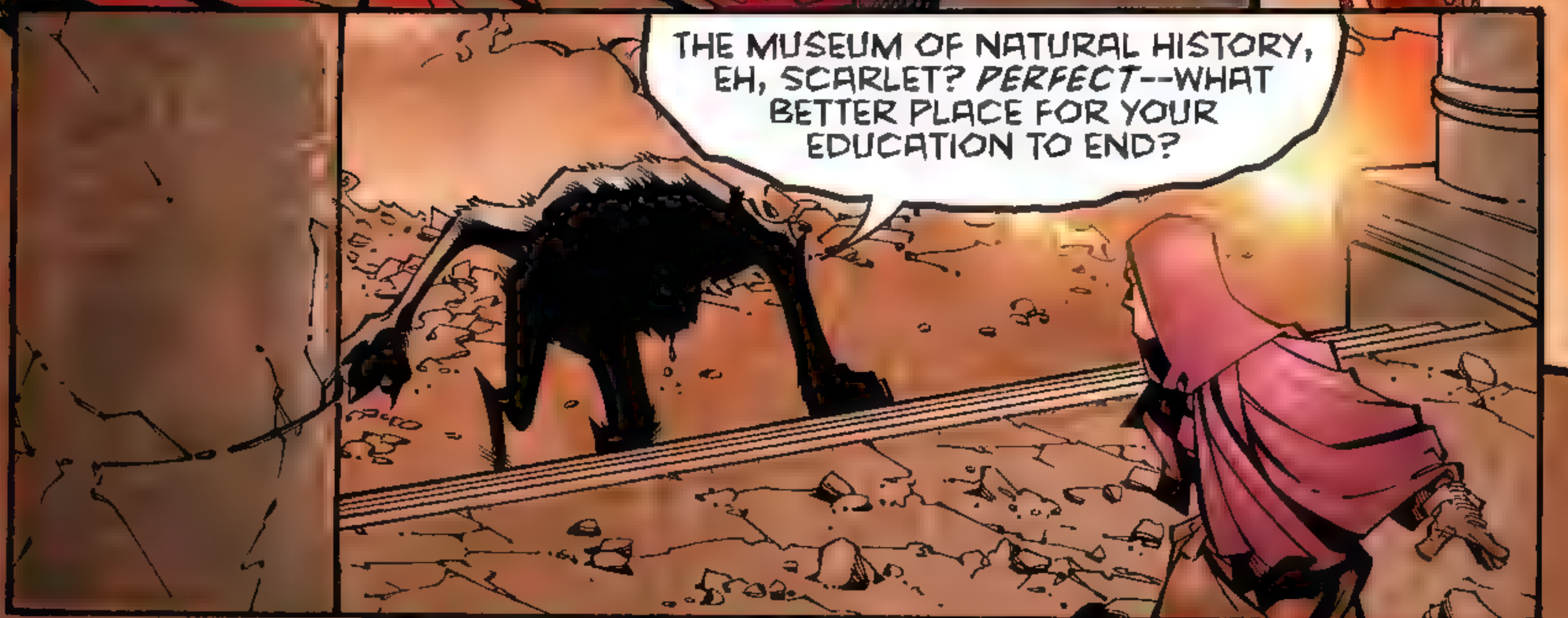
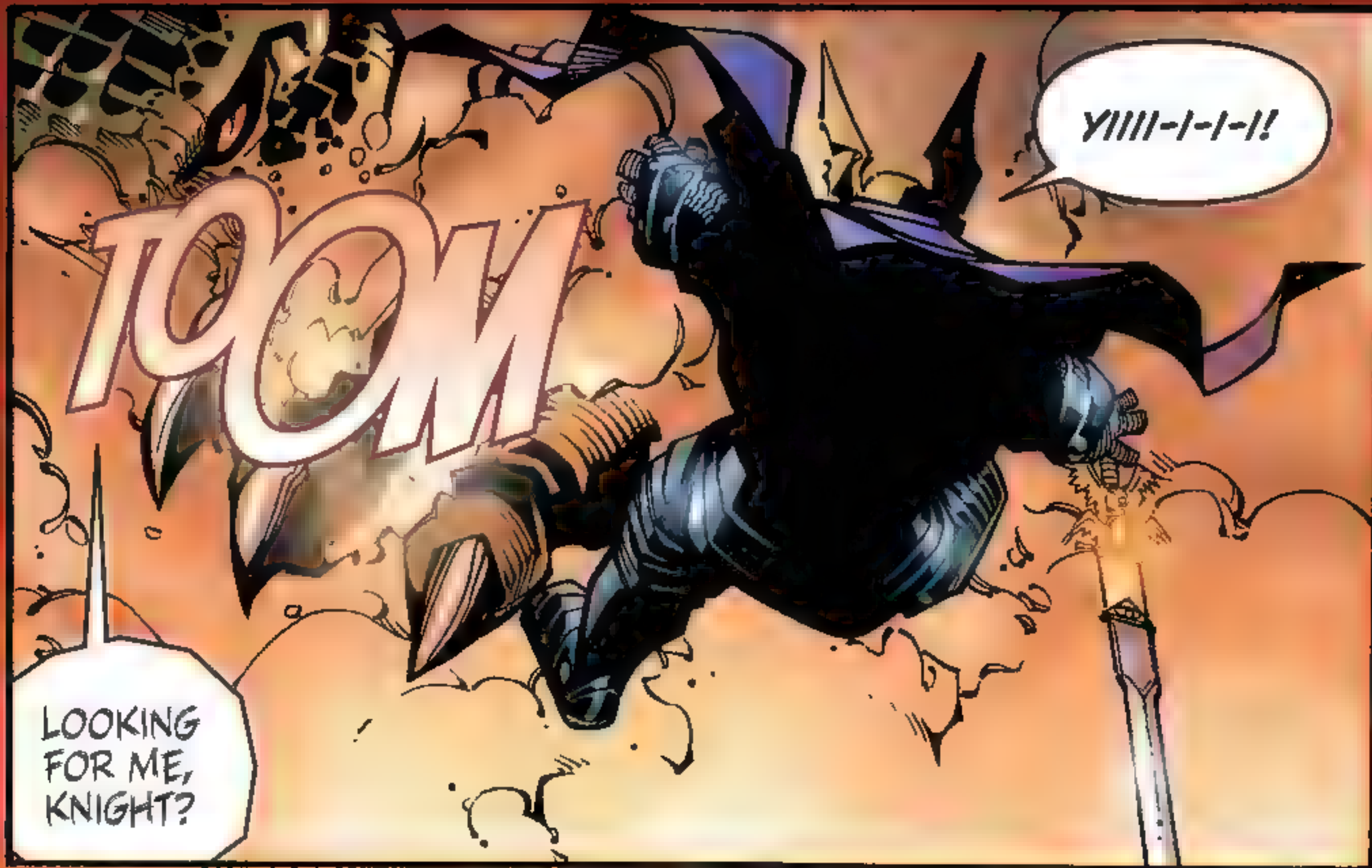
NO,
ALEX...!

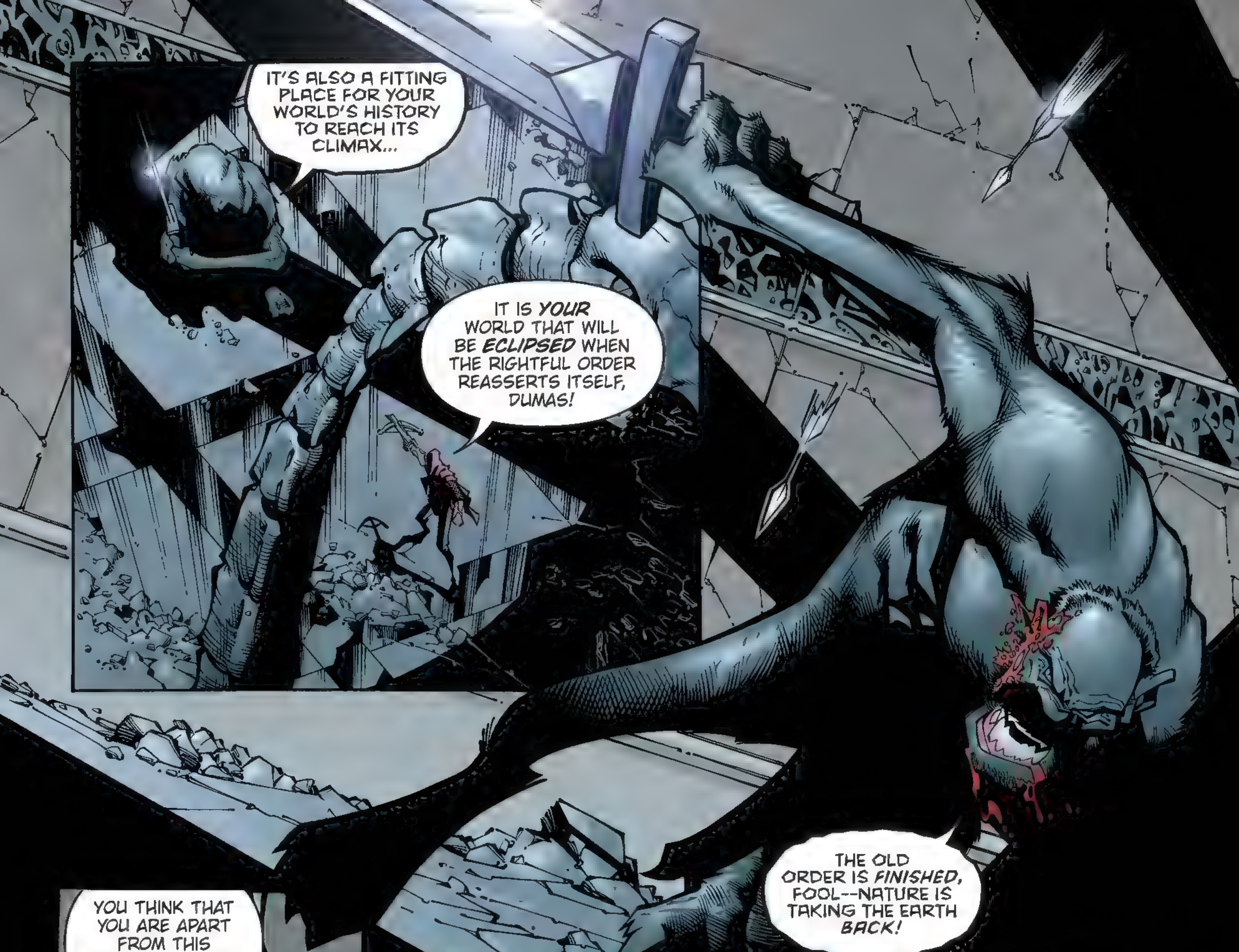


I CAN'T LET THE
BOY FACE SAPHA
ALONE... I HAVE
TO GET TO THAT
OLD LIZARD
FIRST!



BUT
WHERE, IN
ALL THIS MIST,
IS *SHE*?

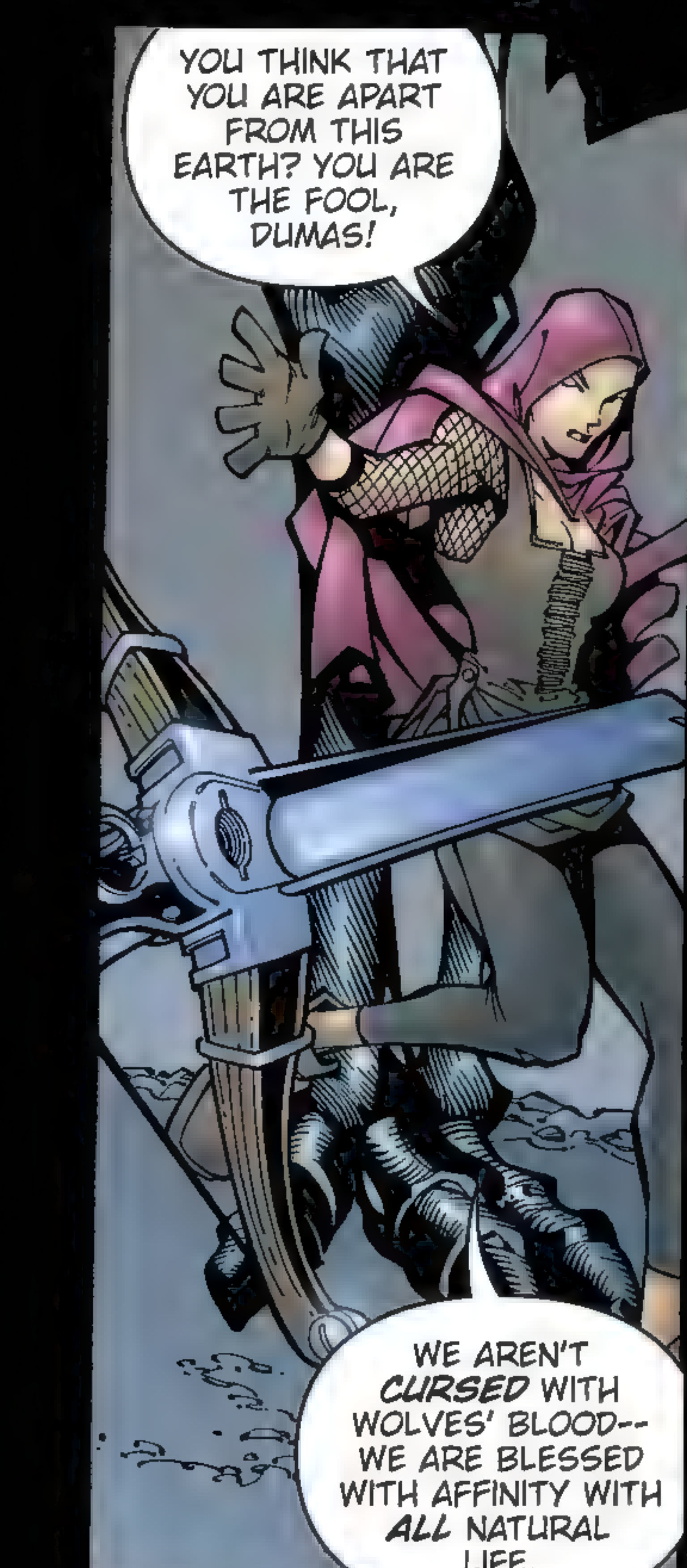




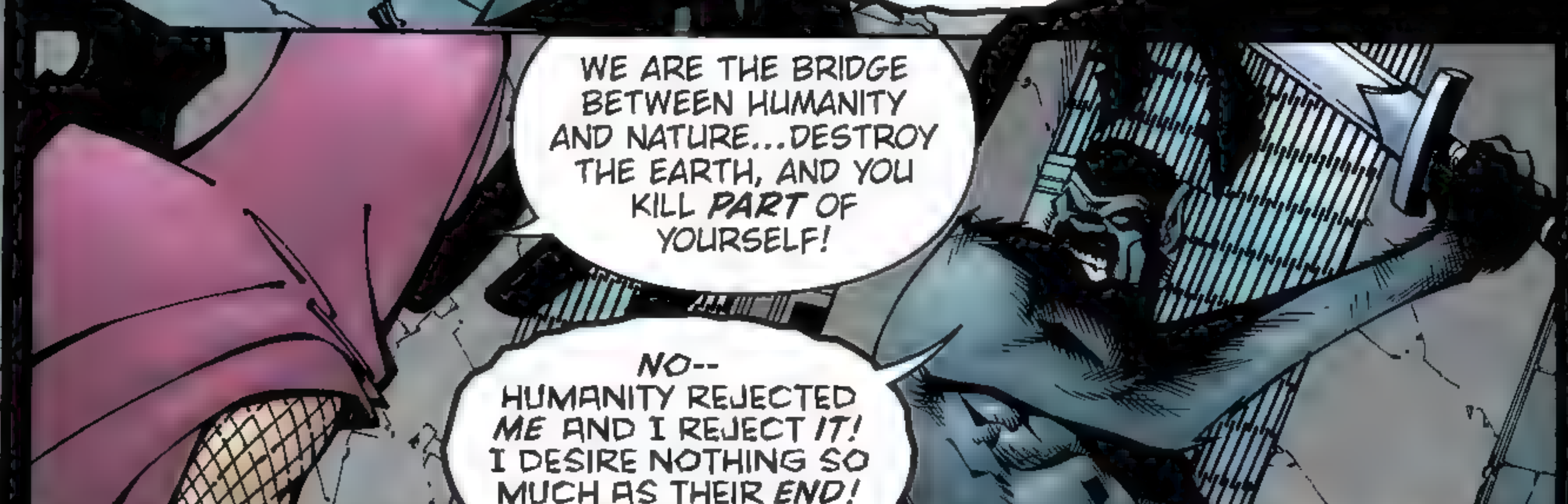
IT'S ALSO A FITTING
PLACE FOR YOUR
WORLD'S HISTORY
TO REACH ITS
CLIMAX...

IT IS *YOUR*
WORLD THAT WILL
BE *ECLIPSED* WHEN
THE RIGHTFUL ORDER
REASSERTS ITSELF,
DUMAS!

THE OLD
ORDER IS *FINISHED*,
FOOL--NATURE IS
TAKING THE EARTH
BACK!



YOU THINK THAT
YOU ARE APART
FROM THIS
EARTH? YOU ARE
THE FOOL,
DUMAS!



WE ARE THE BRIDGE
BETWEEN HUMANITY
AND NATURE...DESTROY
THE EARTH, AND YOU
KILL *PART* OF
YOURSELF!

NO--
HUMANITY REJECTED
ME AND I REJECT IT!
I DESIRE NOTHING SO
MUCH AS THEIR END!

WE AREN'T
CURSED WITH
WOLVES' BLOOD--
WE ARE BLESSED
WITH AFFINITY WITH
ALL NATURAL
LIFE.

KLAKT

AND YOURS,
BETRAYER!

AAARG

SLATTER

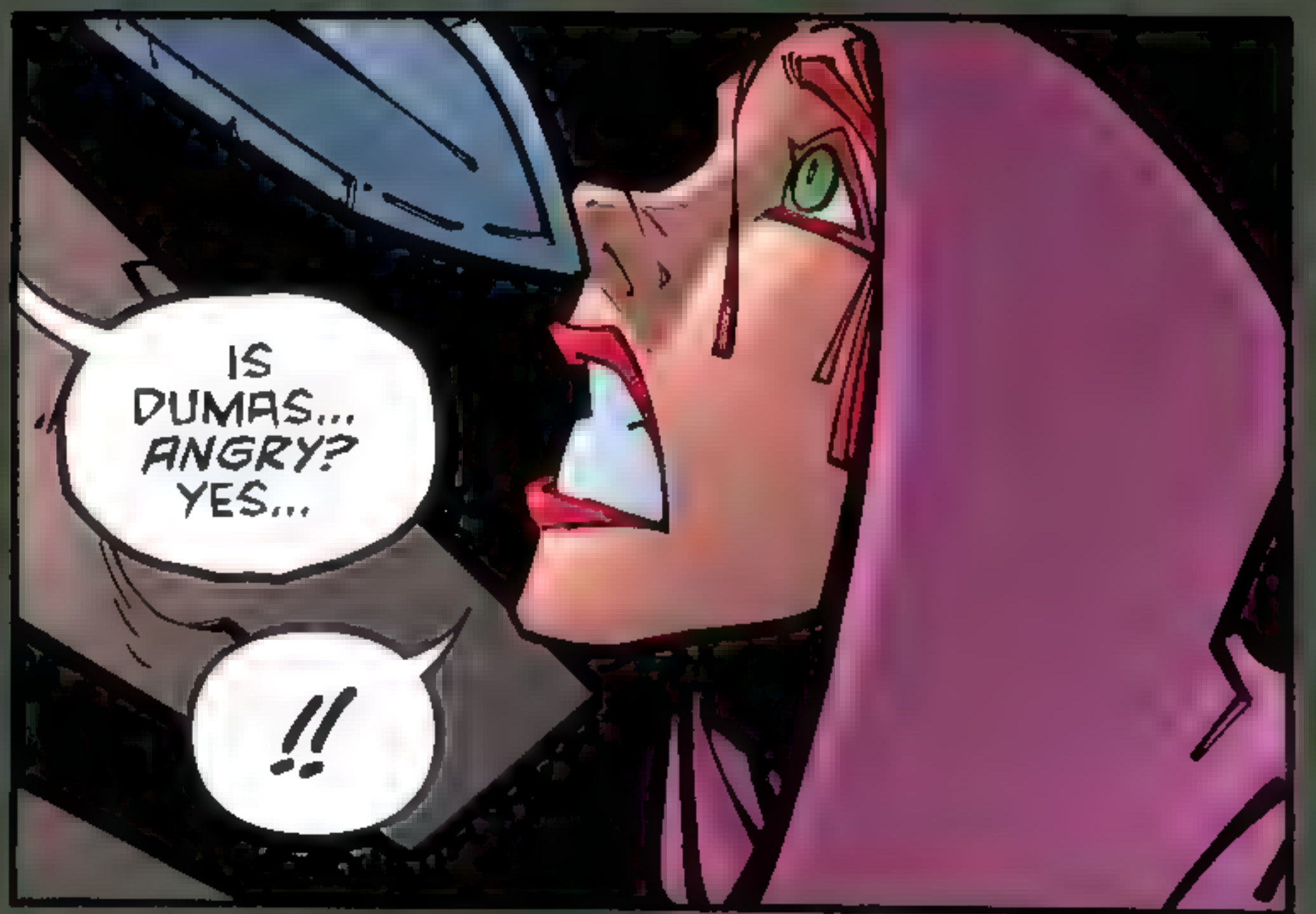


UNN--!



BURIED
UNDER THESE...
BONES--!

IS
DUMAS...?

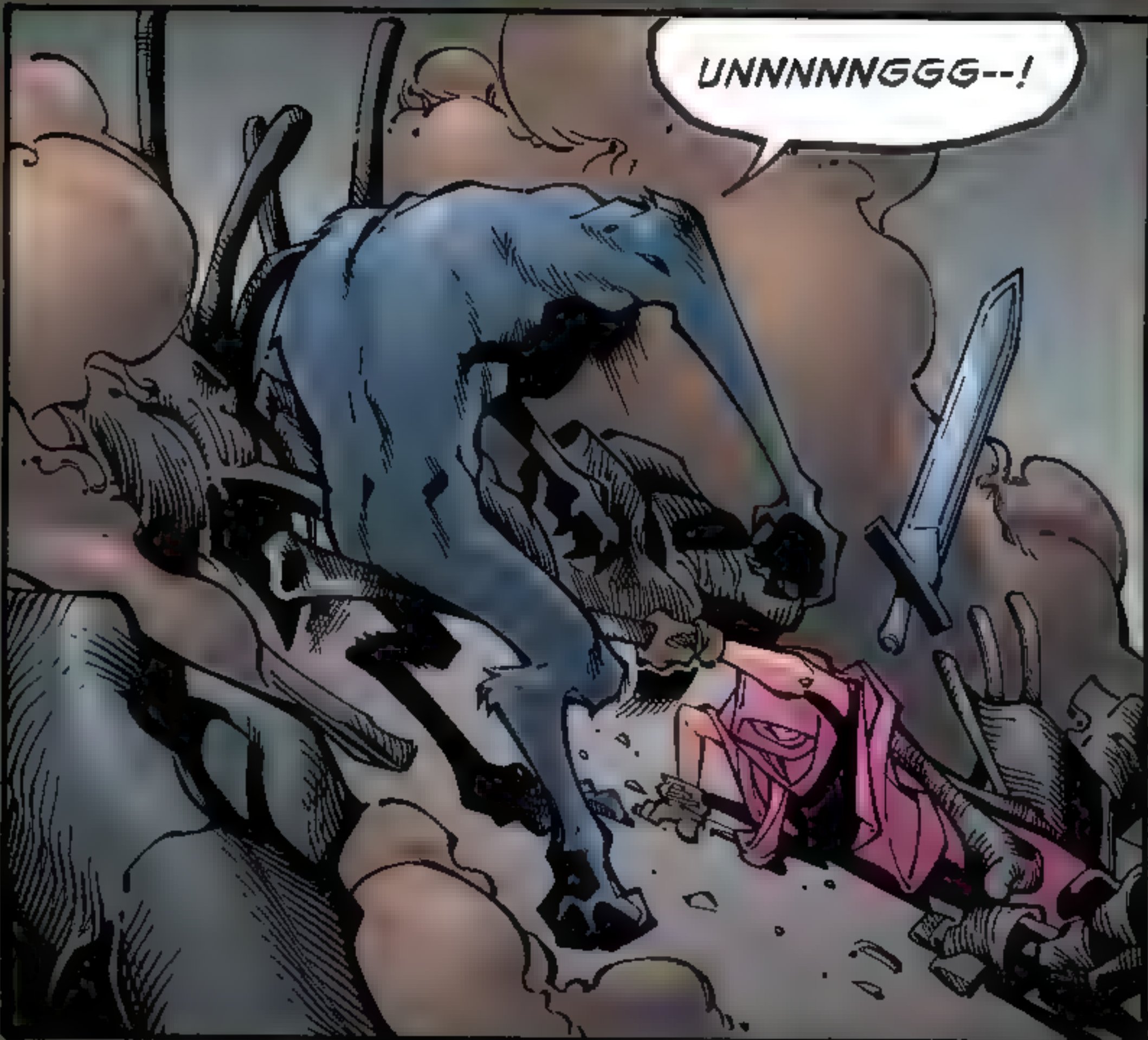


IS
DUMAS...
ANGRY?
YES...

!!



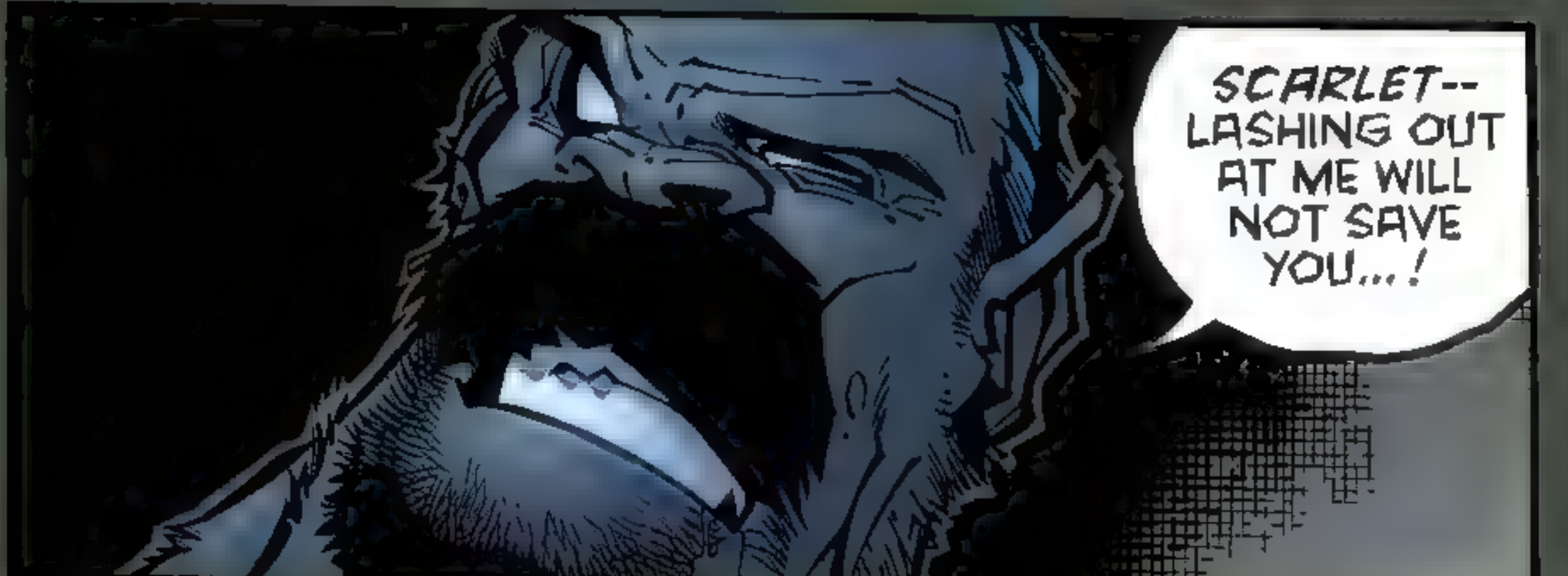
... IS DUMAS
READY TO TAKE
YOUR **WORTHLESS**
LIFE? OH...
YES... !



UNNNNNGGG--!



OHhhh...



SCARLET--
LASHING OUT
AT ME WILL
NOT SAVE
YOU... !



ALL YOU
HAVE DONE IS ADD
TO THE PAIN OF YOUR
OWN **INEVITABLE**
DEMISE, SCARLET!
WHERE ARE YOU
GIRL... ?



TWANG
TWANG



ANTIQUE INDIAN WITH
ARROWS? WHAT DO
YOU EXPECT **RELICS** TO
ACCOMPLISH?!





THE KNIGHT MAY HAVE FORGOTTEN YOUR DUPLCITY, DRAGON, BUT I DID NOT!



LET US PRESS THE ADVANTAGE AND KILL THIS SNAKE!



YOU TWO ARE NOTHING! WE COULD FIGHT FOR YEARS AND YOU WOULD NOT FINISH US! YOU WILL BOTH PAY DEARLY FOR YOUR PAIN, HOWEVER...



...BUT LATER... I HAVE A WORLD TO CONQUER...AND NO MORE TIME TO WASTE.

THE COWARD RUNS--?!

NOT IF I CAN STOP HIM...



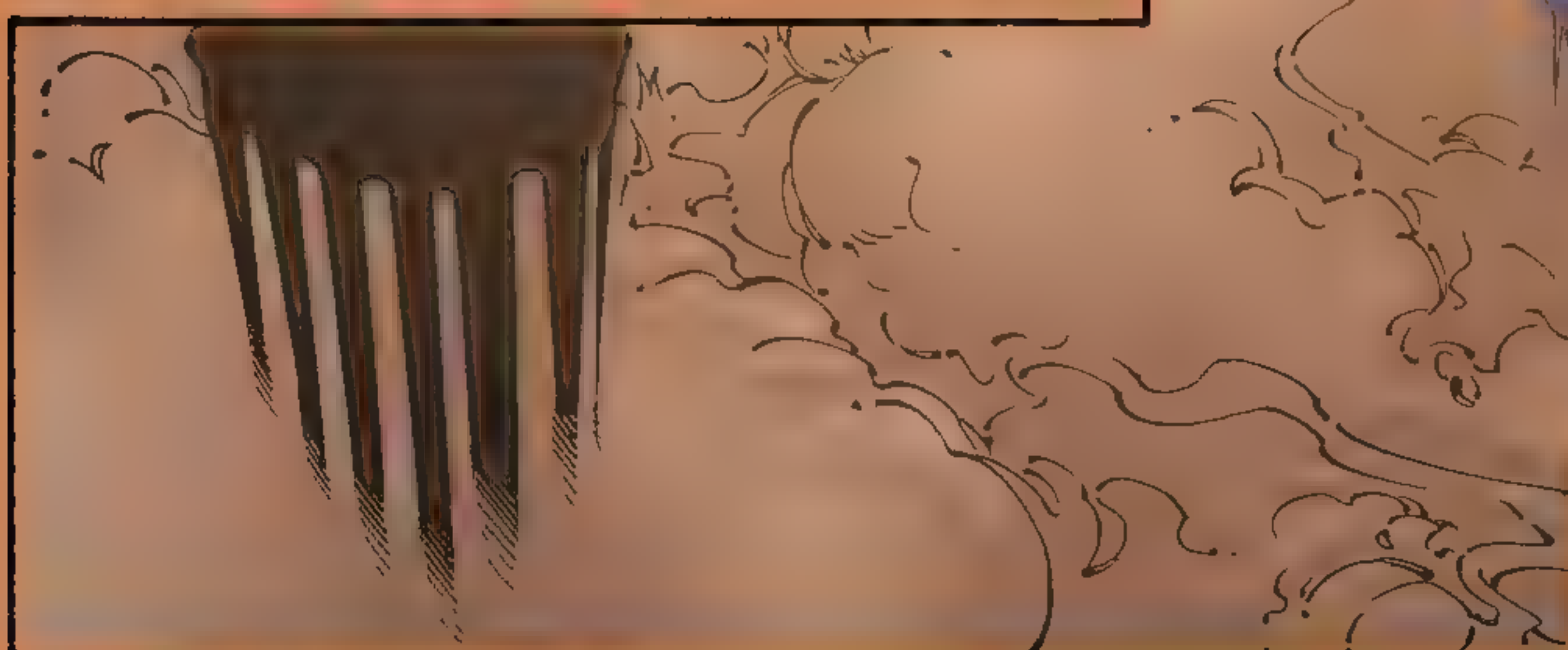
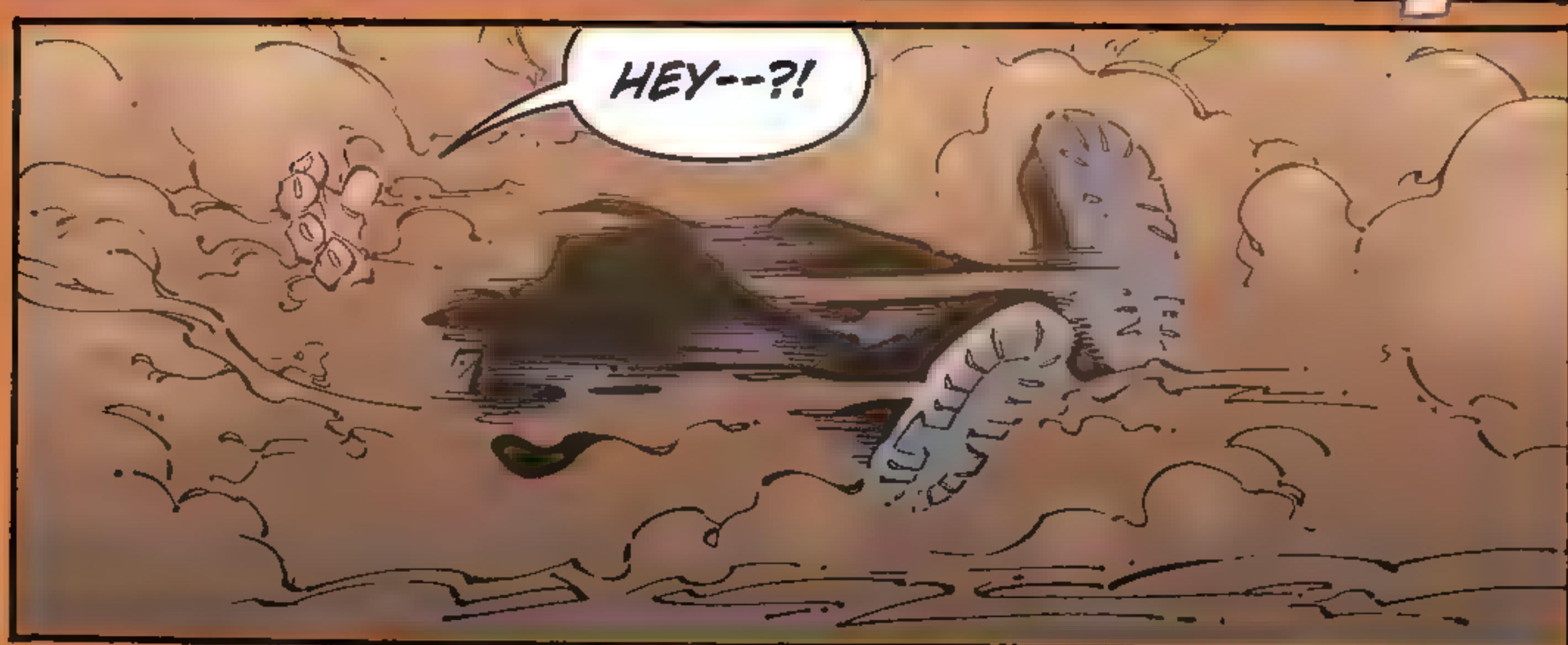
SAPHA IS RIGHT...EVEN SORELY WOUNDED, HE IS TOO POWERFUL TO COMPLETELY DESTROY...

IF WE CONCEDE THAT, HE WILL RULE THE PLANET.



THERE MIGHT BE ONE WAY TO NEUTRALIZE SAPHA.

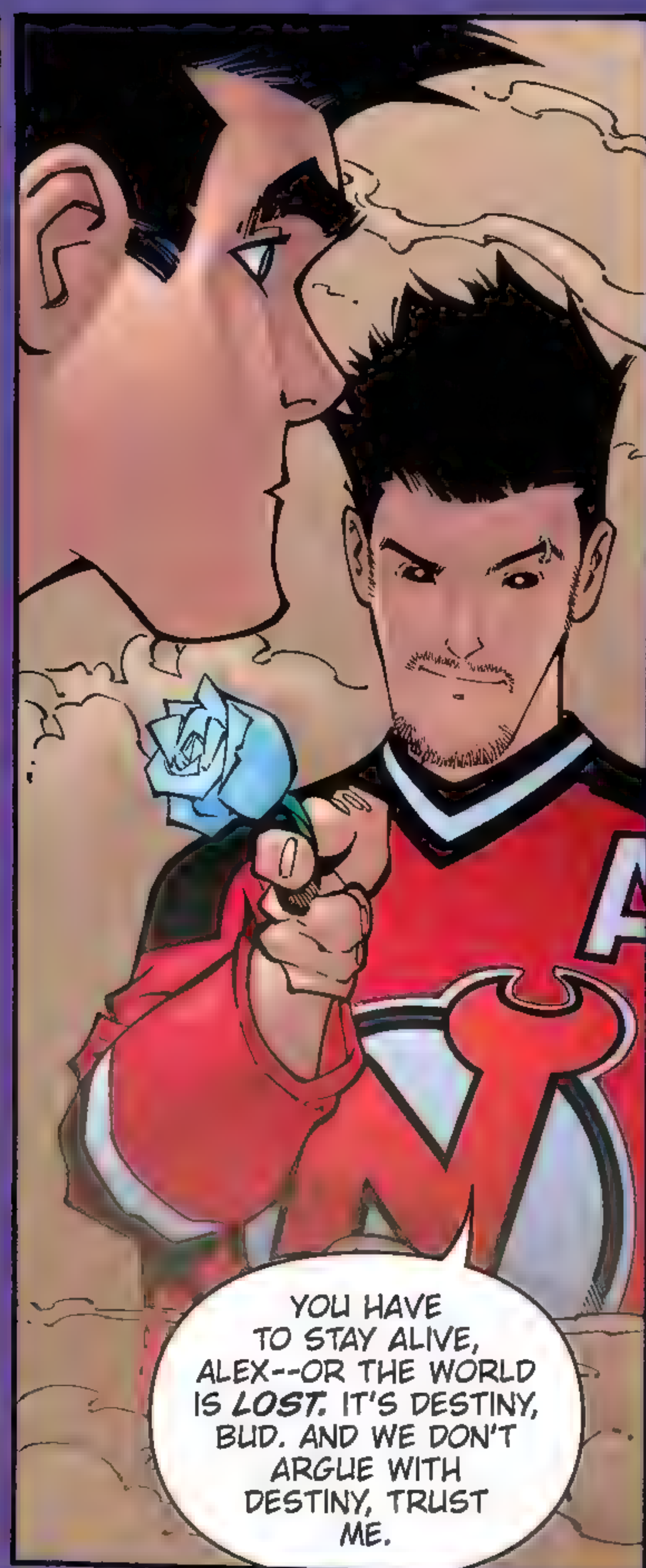
LISTEN...



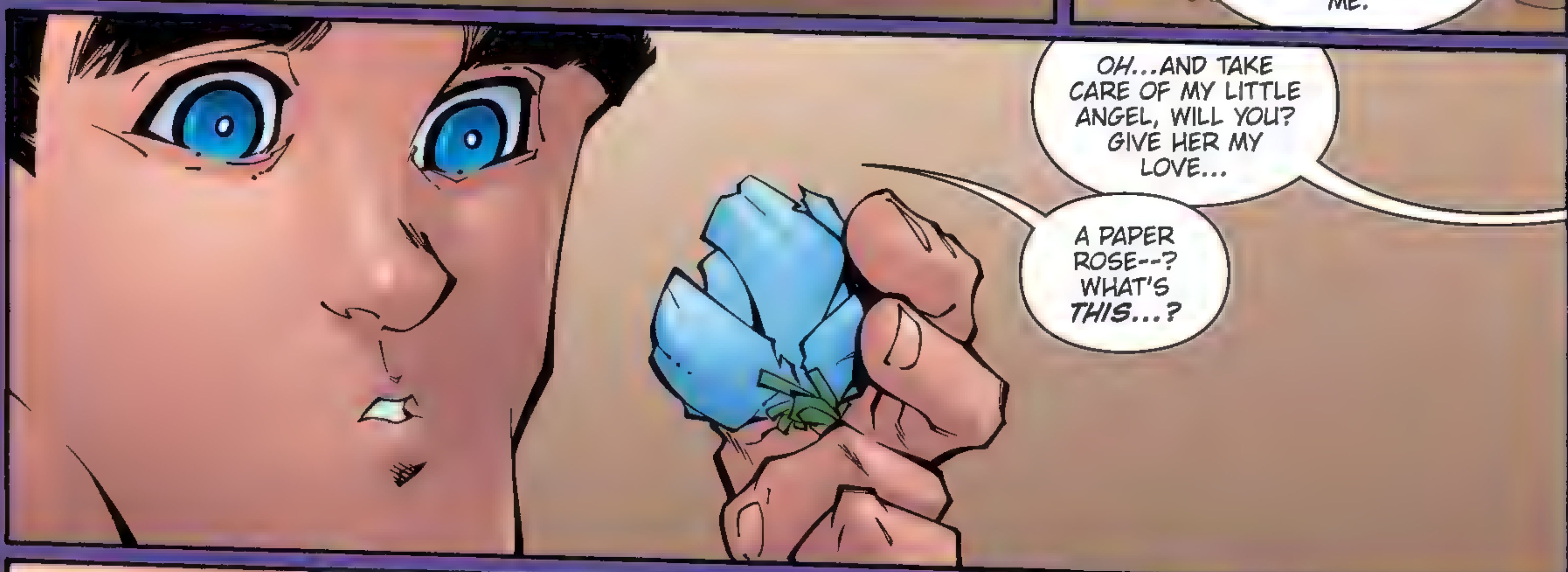


LM...THE
FOG? IT'S...
HOLDING ME
HERE--?!

IT'S FOR
YOUR OWN GOOD,
ALEX. IF I LET YOU
GO, YOU MIGHT **DIE**
OUT THERE. WE CAN'T
HAVE THAT. YOU HAVE
BEEN CHOSEN FOR A
MUCH BIGGER PART
IN THE DRAMA TO
COME.



YOU HAVE
TO STAY ALIVE,
ALEX--OR THE WORLD
IS **LOST**. IT'S DESTINY,
BUD. AND WE DON'T
ARGUE WITH
DESTINY, TRUST
ME.

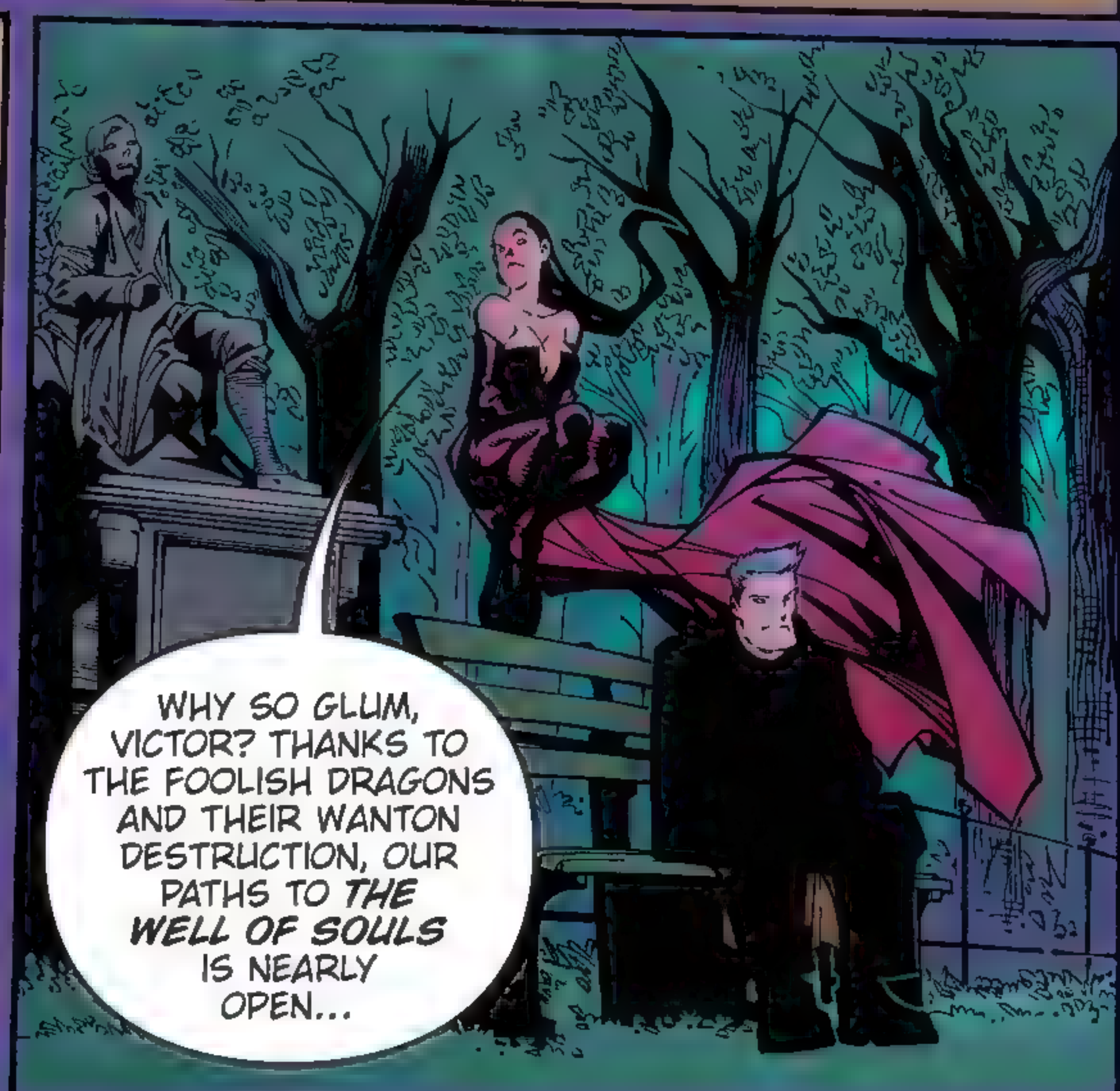


OH...AND TAKE
CARE OF MY LITTLE
ANGEL, WILL YOU?
GIVE HER MY
LOVE...

A PAPER
ROSE--?
WHAT'S
THIS...?



ZOPHIE--? ANGEL
ZOPHIEL. OH...
YOUR ANGEL. I
GET IT. I'LL
TELL HER.



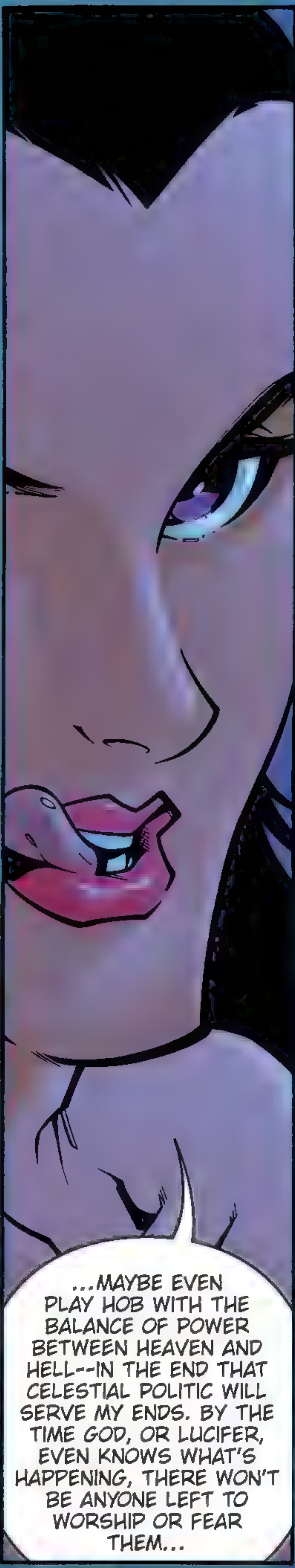
WHY SO GLUM,
VICTOR? THANKS TO
THE FOOLISH DRAGONS
AND THEIR WANTON
DESTRUCTION, OUR
PATHS TO **THE**
WELL OF SOULS
IS NEARLY
OPEN...



ONCE WE
CONTROL THE **WELL**,
WE SHALL DESTROY IT
AND ALL THE **SOULS**
STORED WITHIN. THEN
LIFE IN THE COSMOS
WILL **END** FOREVER. IN
GRATITUDE, WHATEVER
CREATURES I ALLOW
TO SURVIVE, WILL
WORSHIP **ME**
ALONE.

NO, IT DOESN'T
WORK THAT WAY. ALL
THE SOULS THAT EVER
WERE ARE IN THE WELL.
GOD MADE THEM FROM
HIS OWN **SUBSTANCE**,
MAKING MORE NOW
WOULD DIMINISH THE
GODHEAD...

IF YOU
DESTROY ALL
LIFE, WON'T GOD
JUST MAKE...
OH, MORE?



...MAYBE EVEN
PLAY HOB WITH THE
BALANCE OF POWER
BETWEEN HEAVEN AND
HELL--IN THE END THAT
CELESTIAL POLITIC WILL
SERVE MY ENDS. BY THE
TIME GOD, OR LUCIFER,
EVEN KNOWS WHAT'S
HAPPENING, THERE WON'T
BE ANYONE LEFT TO
WORSHIP OR FEAR
THEM...



...AND
ABSENT THEIR
PAWNS, THE POWERS
THAT WILL SIMPLY...
FADE AWAY.

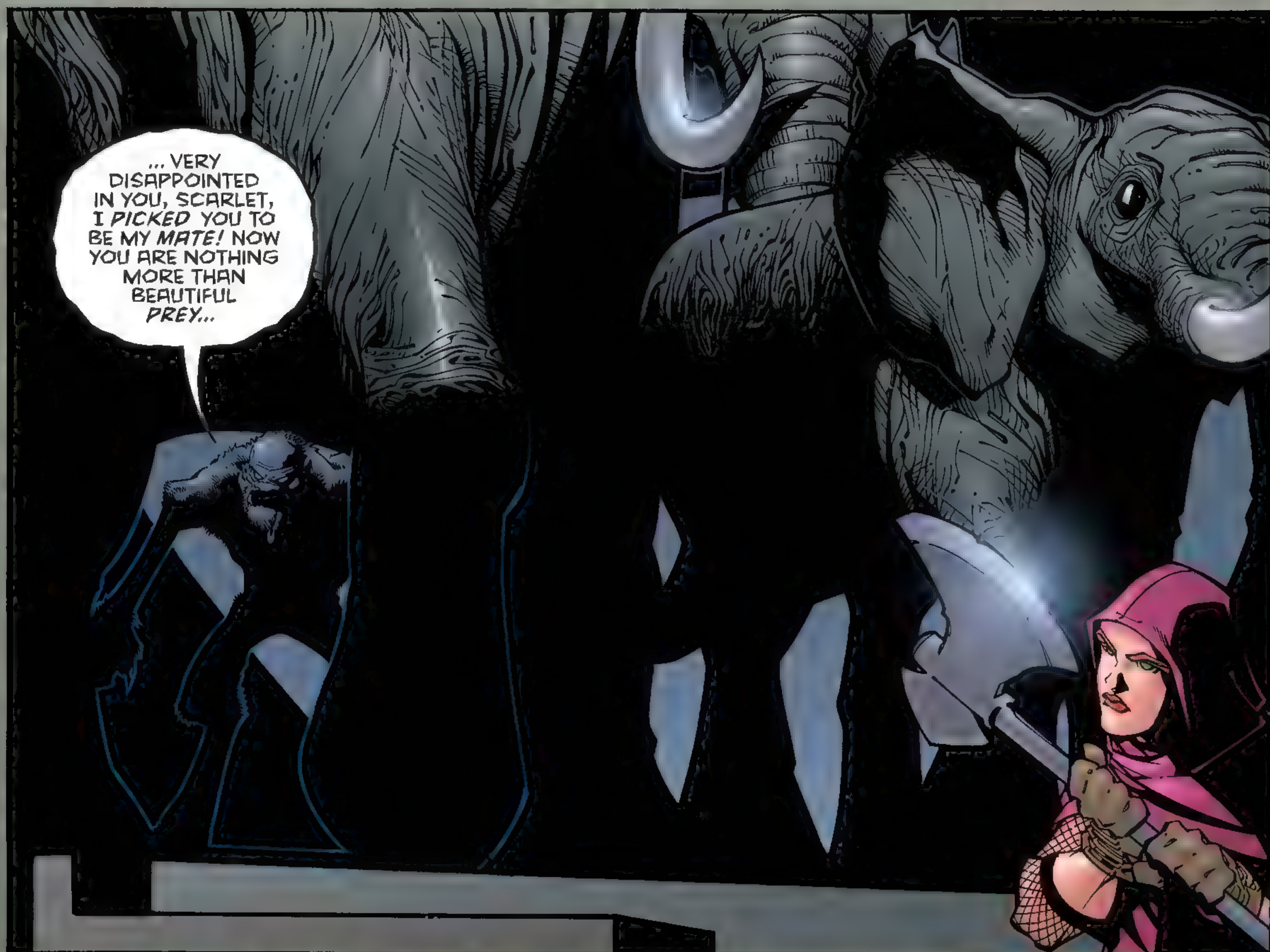


SO, GOD
IS LIKE **TINKERBELL**.
WHO KNEW? THIS SOUNDS
COMPLETELY **INSANE**, YOU
KNOW. WHY DID I EVER
SIGN ON...?

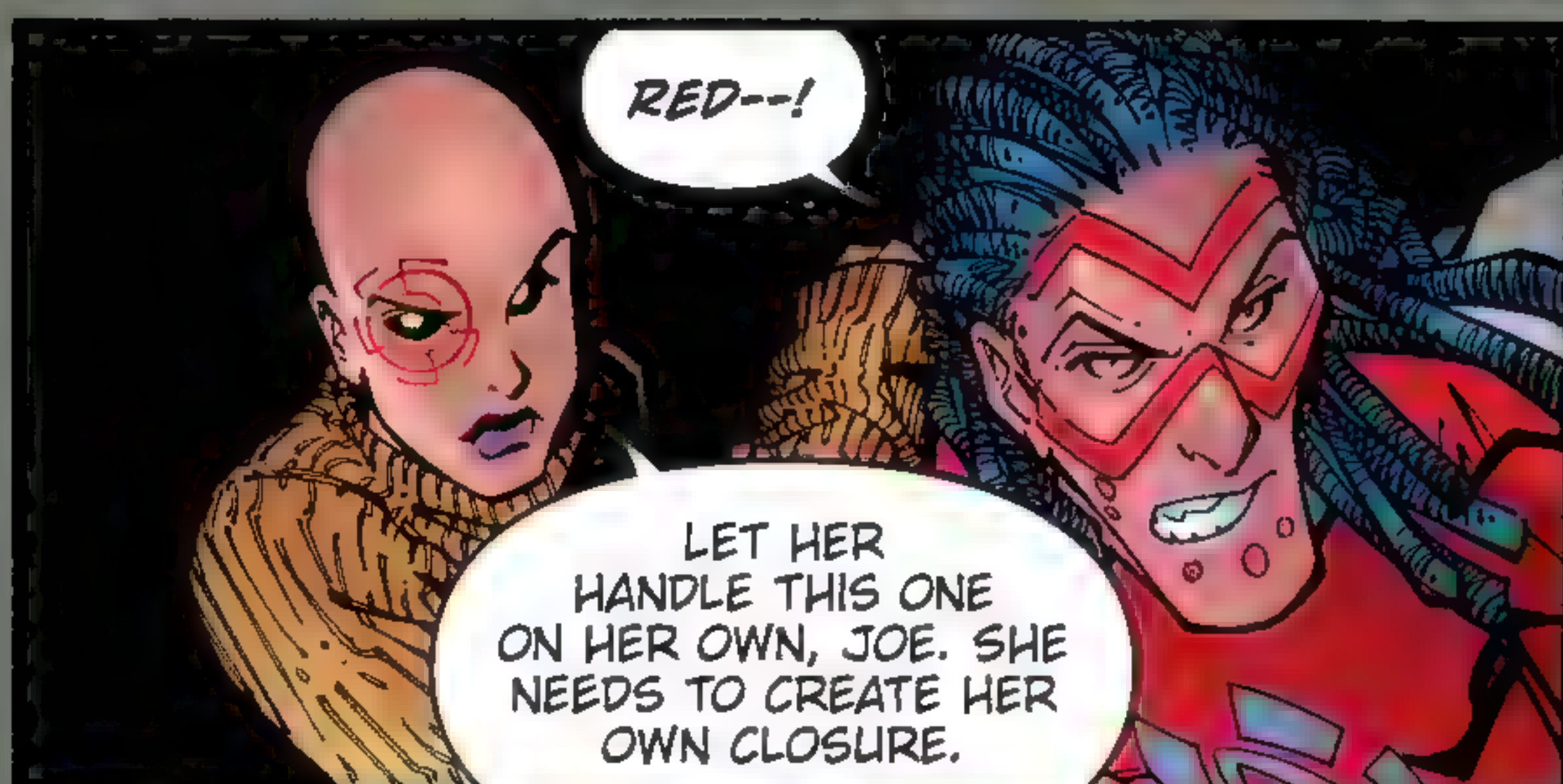


FOR THE
ADVENTURE,
VICTOR...!

HAAAAA!



... VERY
DISAPPOINTED
IN YOU, SCARLET,
I PICKED YOU TO
BE MY MATE! NOW
YOU ARE NOTHING
MORE THAN
BEAUTIFUL
PREY...



RED--!

LET HER
HANDLE THIS ONE
ON HER OWN, JOE. SHE
NEEDS TO CREATE HER
OWN CLOSURE.



KLANG

UFF--!



YOU CANNOT
STAND AGAINST ME MUCH
LONGER GIRL! LIKE THESE
MAMMOTHS, YOU ARE
EXTINCT!

UFF--!

SKLASH



BON
VOYAGE,
CHERI...



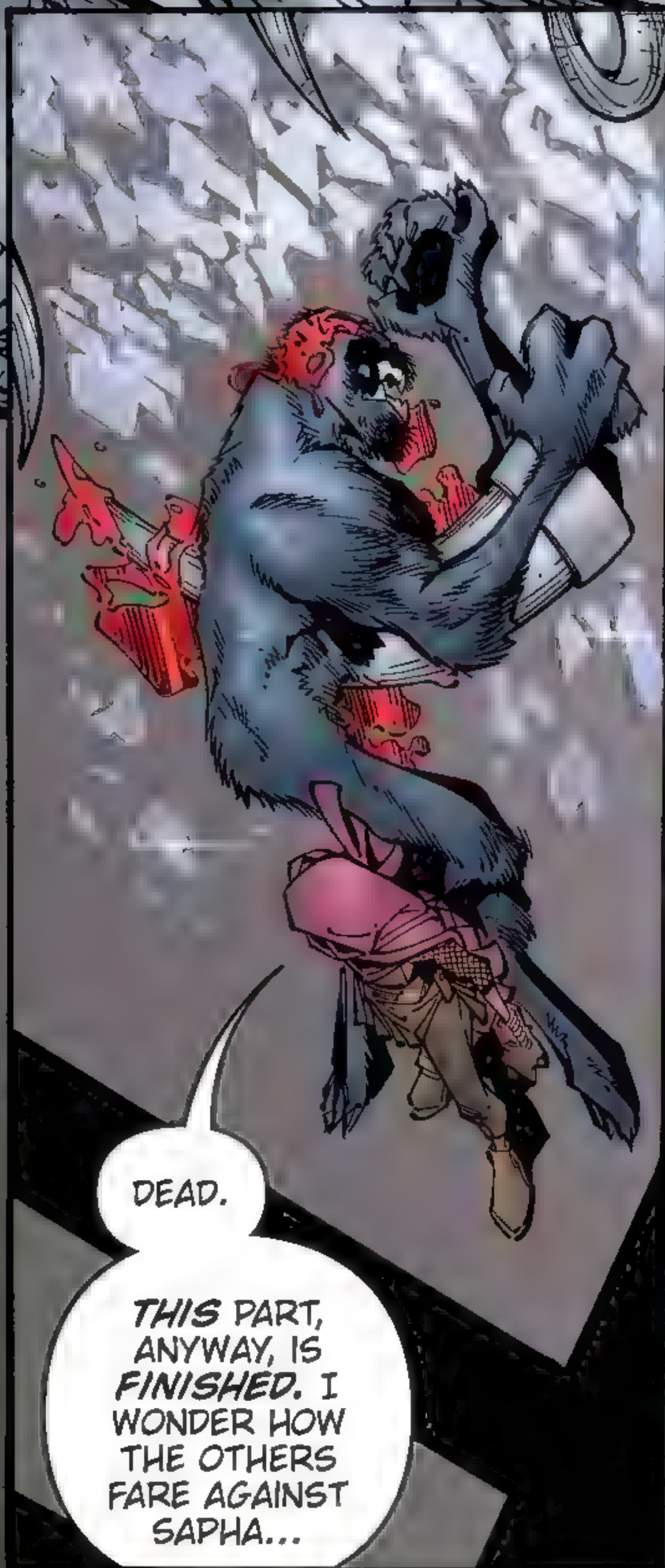
NON.
MAL VOYAGE,
POUR VOUS,
DUMAS.

WH--?



H-HOW...

UHHHHHHH--



DEAD.

THIS PART,
ANYWAY, IS
FINISHED. I
WONDER HOW
THE OTHERS
FARE AGAINST
SAPHA...



NOW IS THE MOMENT
YOU PAY FOR ALL THE
DRAGONS YOU HAVE
EXTERMINATED, ST.
GEORGE --

NO...MY
WORK IS
UNFINISHED
WHILE YOU
LIVE...



HA--!

SWAAAGH



WHOOOSH



NOTHING BUT ASH? HE SACRIFICED HIMSELF-- BUT WHY?



AAAAAAAAHHH!

WHA--?!

YOU WERE RIGHT, YOU COULDN'T BE **KILLED**, THERE IS NO WAY AND NO **TIME** TO KILL AN **IMMORTAL EVIL**...



SPWAAASH

WELCOME TO THE **VOID** OF **ETERNITY**, SAPHA. HERE WE WILL STAY, APART FROM REALITY FOREVER! HERE WE HAVE NOTHING BUT **UNENDING** TIME...

...HERE I WILL FIGHT YOU AND DEFEAT YOU--AND **KILL** YOU--A **BILLION** TIMES. THEN WE WILL BEGIN AGAIN...

NOOOOOOOO!!

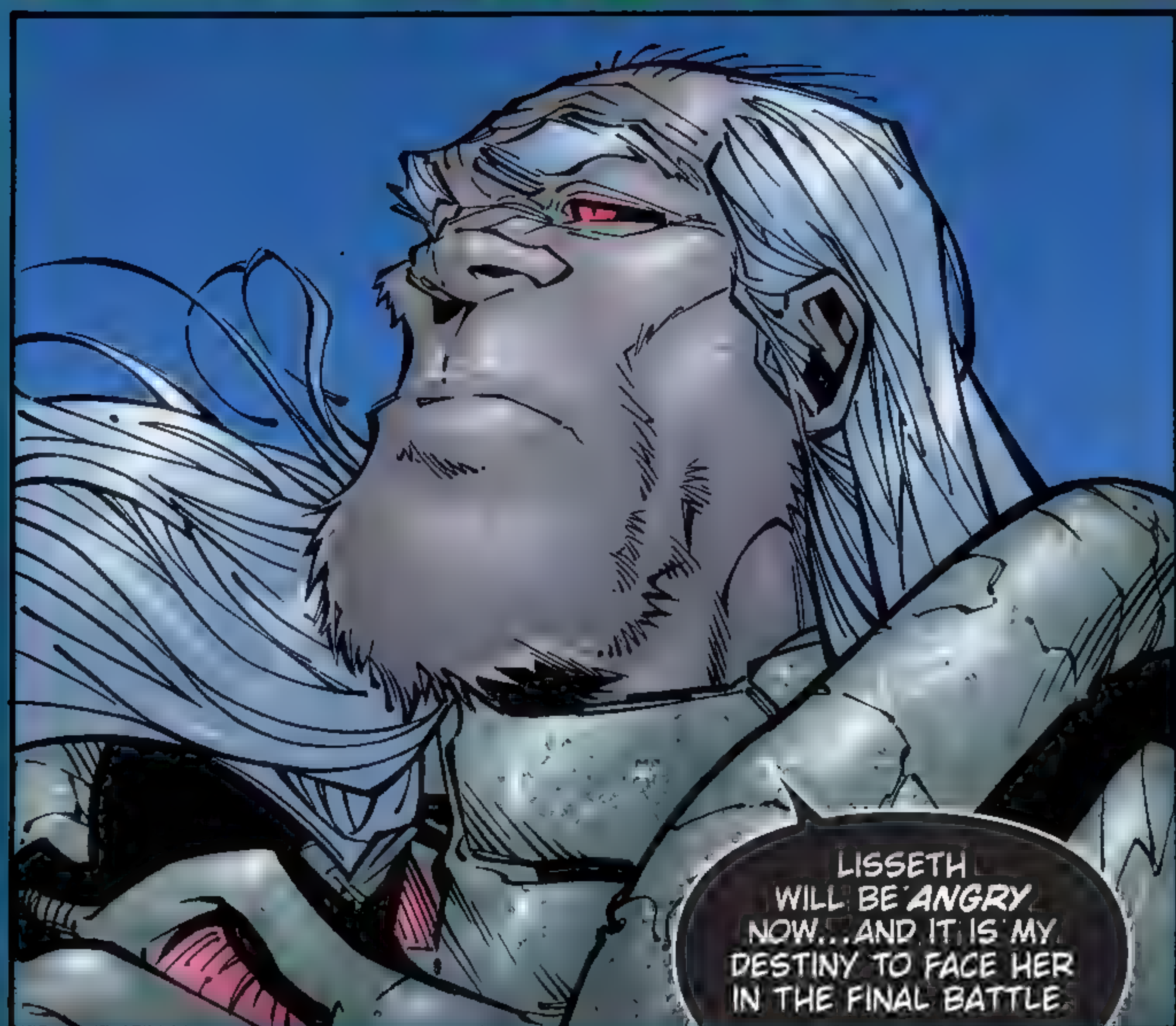


THE FOG IS GONE...AND THE DRAGONS ARE ALL GONE. IS IT OVER?

THE THREAT OF THE DRAGONS HAS ENDED, YES. ST. GEORGE HAS SACRIFICED HIS ETERNITY TO SAVE US ALL.

ST. GEORGE--? OH...GOD...HE'S GONE?

WE'VE NO TIME YET TO GRIEVE, ALEX. THE VERY WORST IS STILL TO COME.



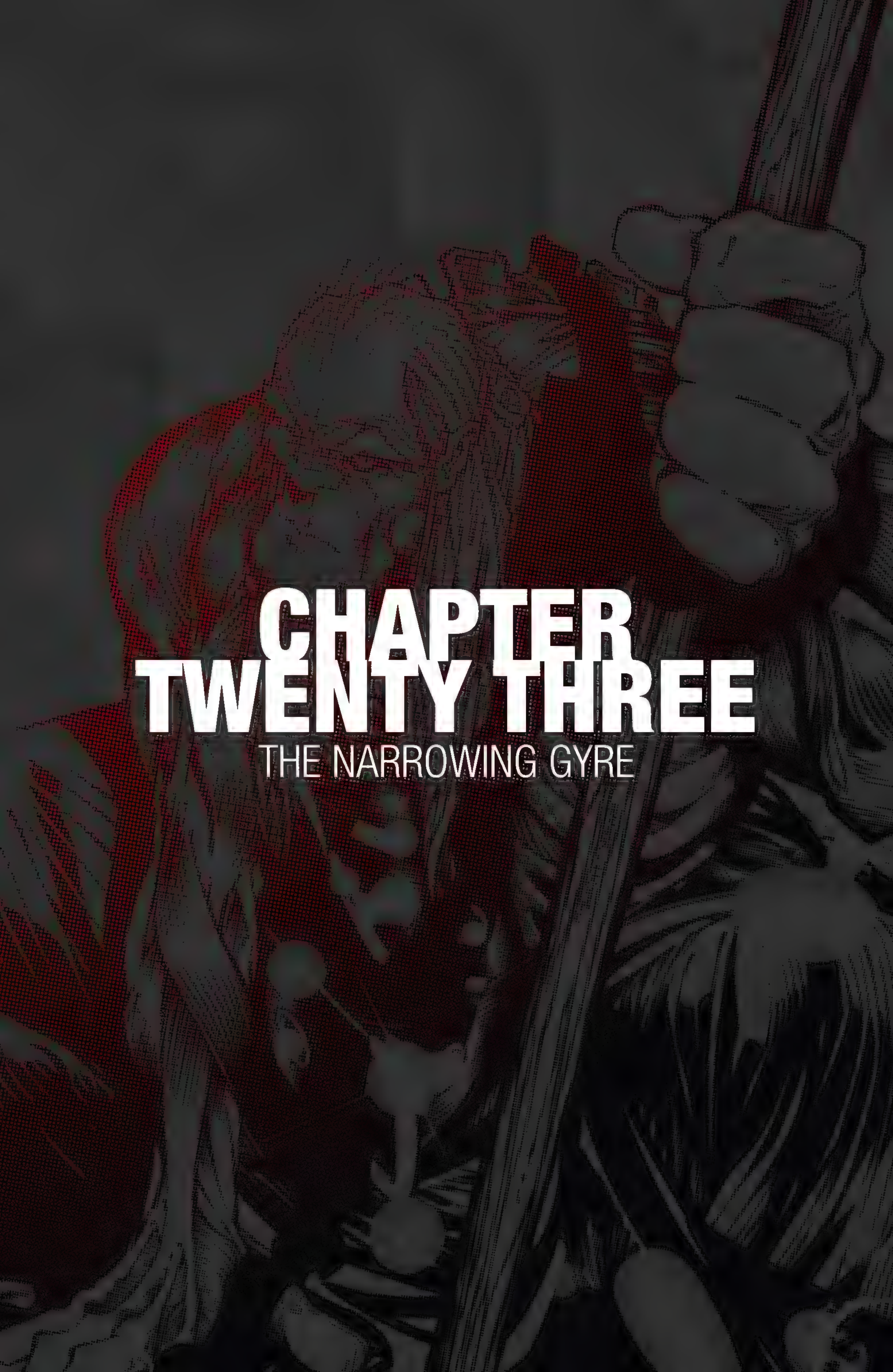
LISSETH WILL BE **ANGRY** NOW...AND IT IS MY DESTINY TO FACE HER IN THE FINAL BATTLE.



OUR DESTINY, ALEX.







CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

THE NARROWING GYRE



THE DRAGONS ARE DEAD...
AND THE WORLD IS IN
RUINS.

HEAVEN'S HERO, ST. GEORGE,
DIED A MARTYR'S DEATH TO
DEFEAT THE BEASTS.

THE WORST, HOWEVER,
IS STILL TO COME.

THE DARK AND TOTAL EVIL BEYOND
THE DRAGONS STILL LIVES...AND
COILS TO STRIKE.

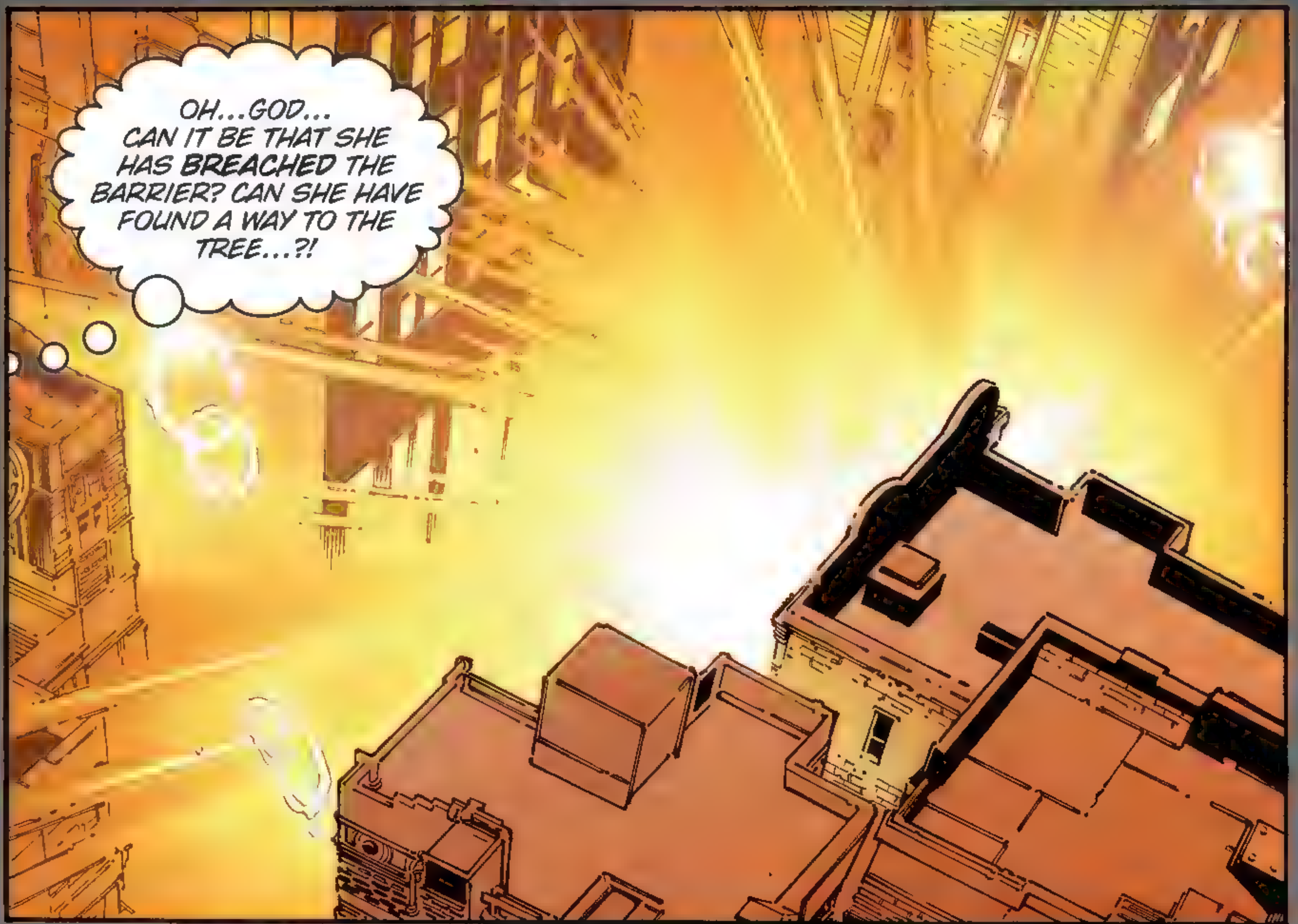
BY TOMORROW, WHATEVER
LIFE REMAINS ON EARTH MAY
BE COMPLETELY ERASED...
FOREVER.



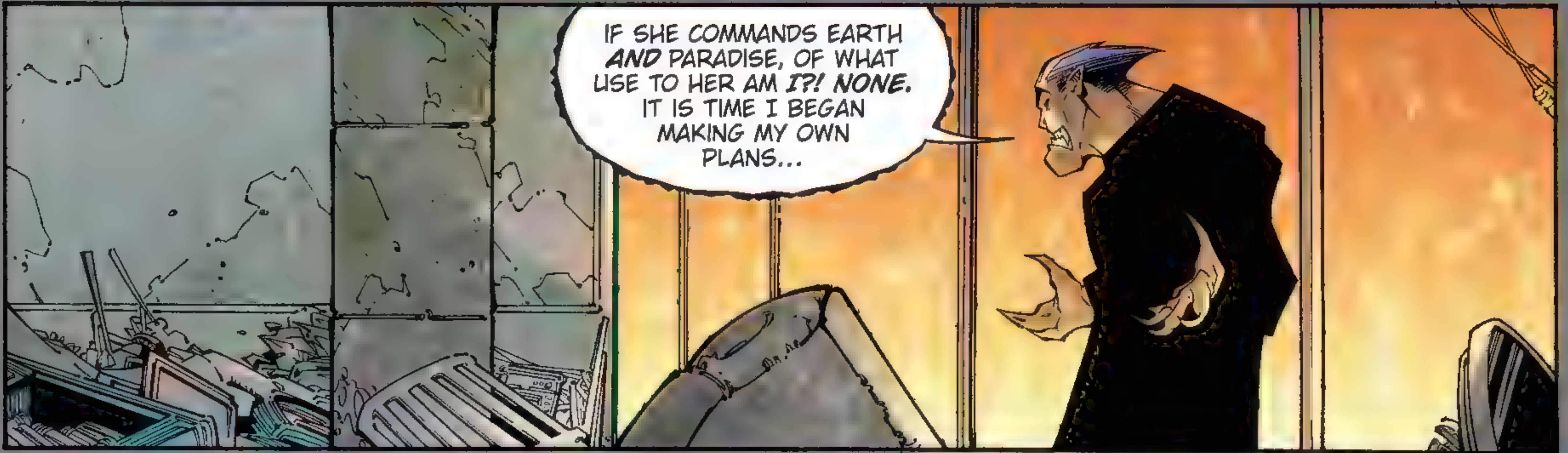
THAT
LIGHT...? WHAT
HAS LISSETH
LOOSED
NOW?!



I NEVER BELIEVED
SHE COULD ACTUALLY
DO IT! BUT ONCE SHE
DESTROYS ALL LIFE,
WHAT WILL BE LEFT
TO RULE?!



OH...GOD...
CAN IT BE THAT SHE
HAS BREACHED THE
BARRIER? CAN SHE HAVE
FOUND A WAY TO THE
TREE...?!



IF SHE COMMANDS EARTH
AND PARADISE, OF WHAT
USE TO HER AM I? NONE.
IT IS TIME I BEGAN
MAKING MY OWN
PLANS...



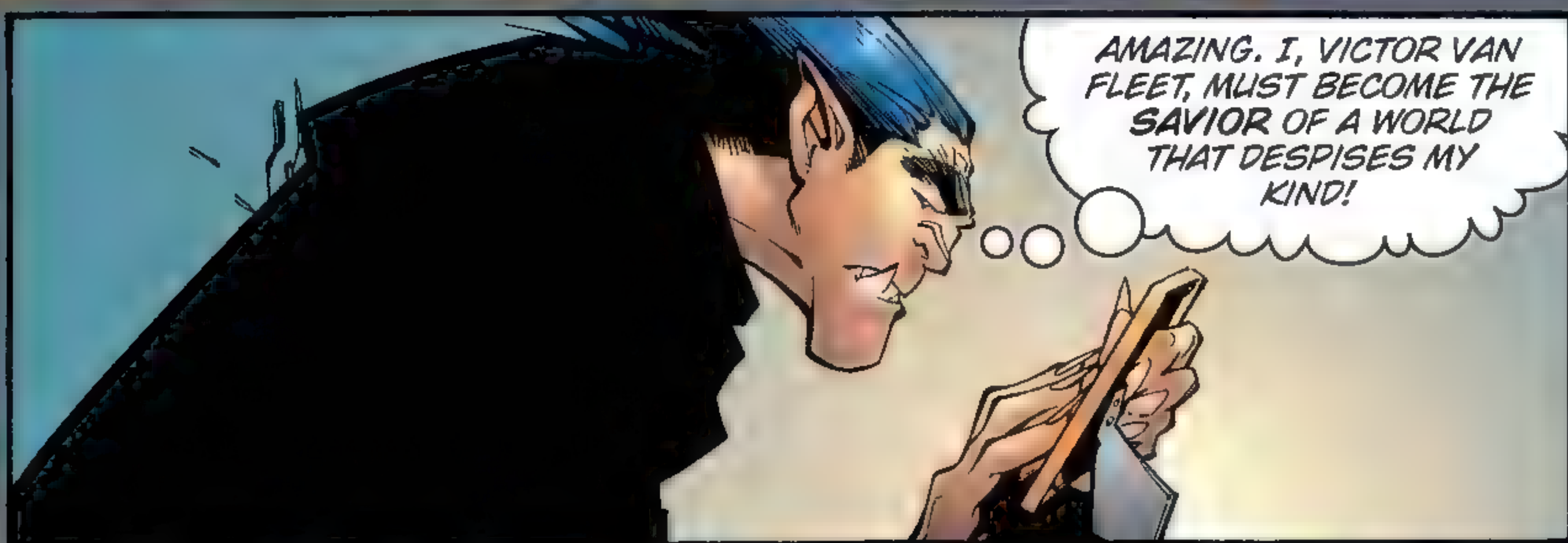
OVER THE ACRID STENCH OF THE DEVASTATED
CITY, A FRESH, SWEET BREEZE WAFTS. IT IS A
SCENT MISSING ON EARTH FOR TRILLIONS OF
YEARS...IT IS THE SCENT OF EDEN.



I MUST DESTROY LISSETH
BEFORE I AM DISCARDED...
BEFORE SHE WIPES
MY WORLD FROM
EXISTENCE!



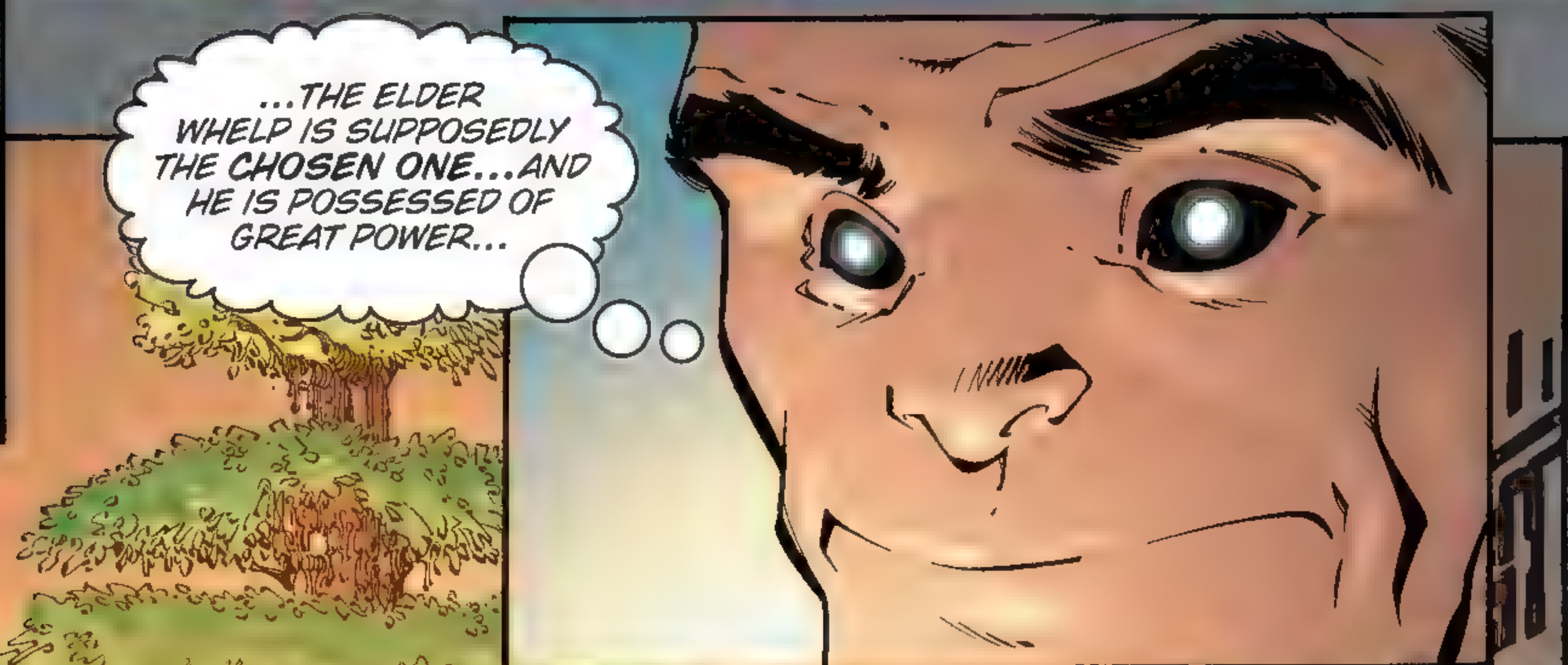
SHE
PROMISED ME A
KINGDOM...BUT WITH
HER, ALL I WILL REIGN
OVER IS SCORCHED
SOIL!



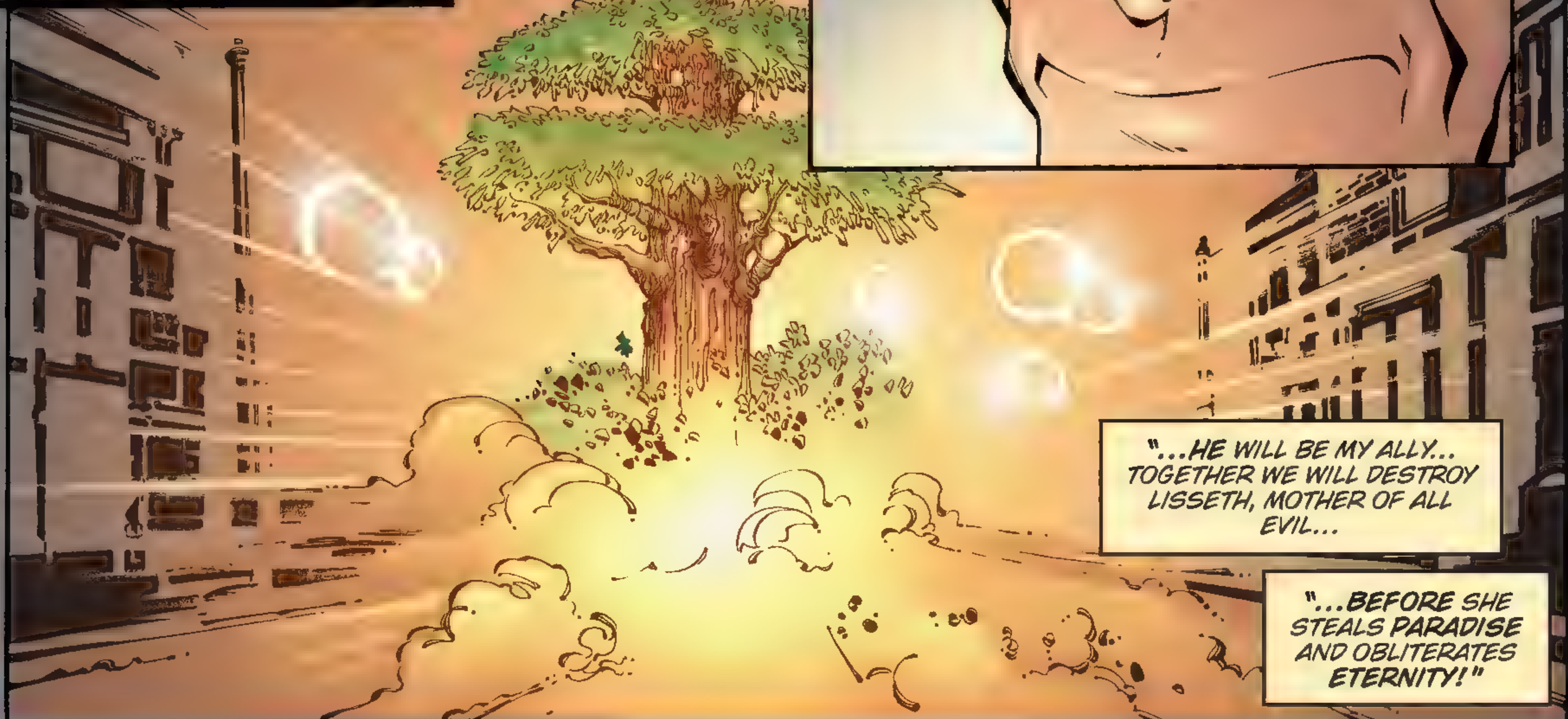
AMAZING. I, VICTOR VAN
FLEET, MUST BECOME THE
SAVIOR OF A WORLD
THAT DESPISES MY
KIND!



BUT I WILL
NOT ACT
ALONE...

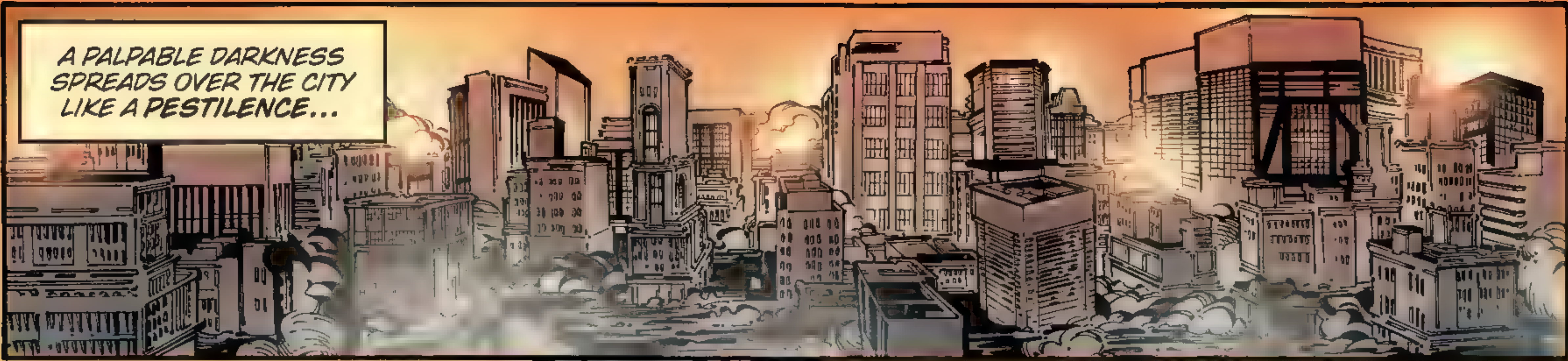


...THE ELDER
WHELP IS SUPPOSEDLY
THE CHOSEN ONE...AND
HE IS POSSESSED OF
GREAT POWER...



"...HE WILL BE MY ALLY..
TOGETHER WE WILL DESTROY
LISSETH, MOTHER OF ALL
EVIL...

"...BEFORE SHE
STEALS PARADISE
AND OBLITERATES
ETERNITY!"

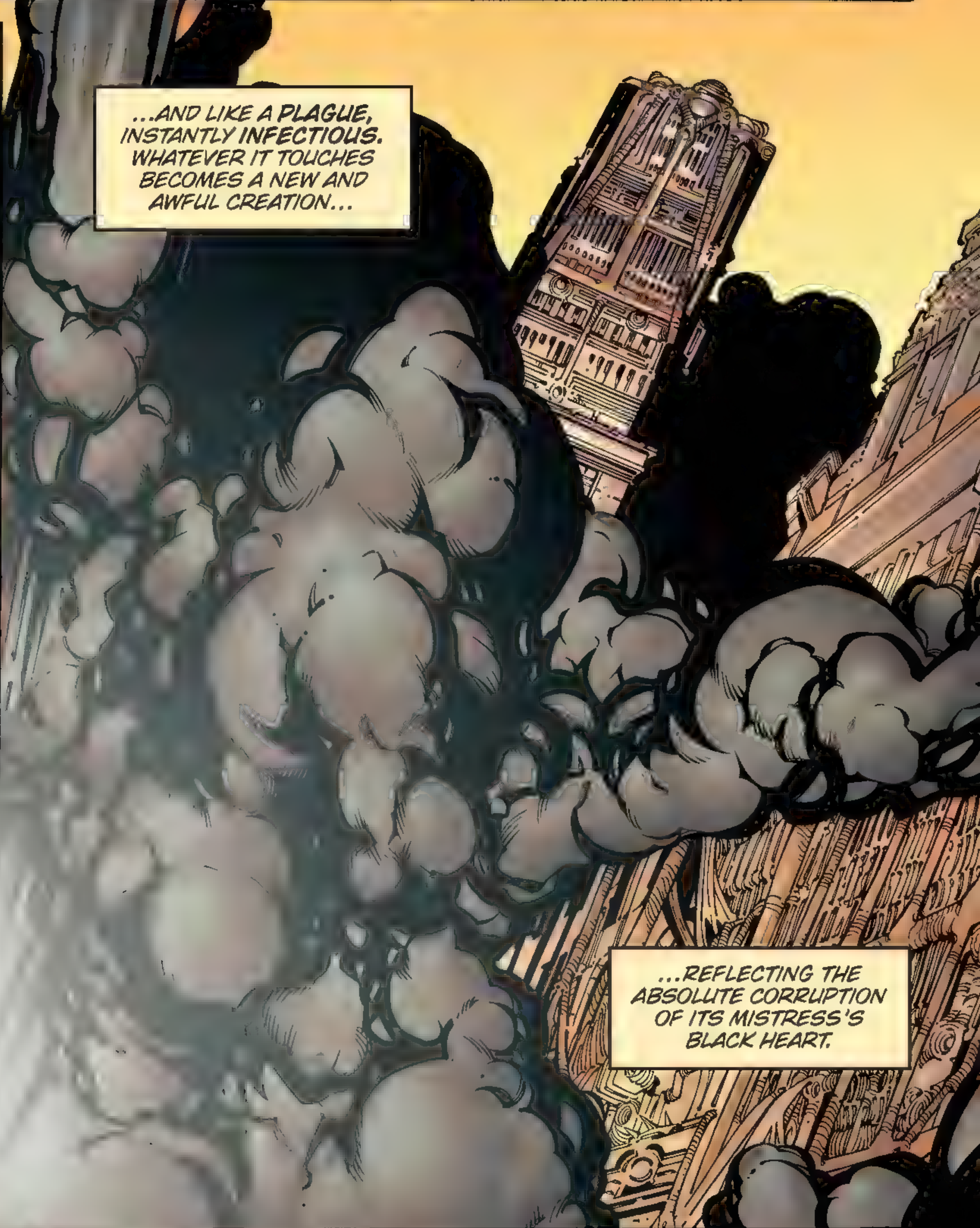


A PALPABLE DARKNESS
SPREADS OVER THE CITY
LIKE A PESTILENCE...



...IT IS LISSETH'S EVIL
MANIFESTED, AND IT IS
UNSTOPPABLE...

AIEEEEE!!!



...AND LIKE A PLAGUE,
INSTANTLY INFECTIOUS.
WHATEVER IT TOUCHES
BECOMES A NEW AND
AWFUL CREATION...

...REFLECTING THE
ABSOLUTE CORRUPTION
OF ITS MISTRESS'S
BLACK HEART.



NO LESS A REFLECTION, THE ANTI-LIFE
OOZE UTTERLY DESTROYS ALL THINGS
ORGANIC.



HEAR THE DEATH THROES OF
A WORLD...AMID THE BIRTH
PANGS OF LISSETH'S DREAD
DOMINION.



ALEX MAY NEED US, WE HAVE TO HURRY!

O-KAY, ZOPHIE...OKAY. GIMME A SEC, IT'S ONLY JUST SUNDOWN AND I JUST GOT UP...



GIMME A BREAK, ANGELITA!

COME ON, JOE!



THEN WAKE UP AND SMELL THE ARMAGEDDON, JOE... WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME LEFT...

LISSETH HAS SUCCEEDED IN OPENING A PORTAL TO THE TREE OF LIFE. WE MUST PROTECT IT FROM HER ADVANCES!



SHE HAS BREACHED PARADISE?!

IT IS LATER THAN EVEN I BELIEVED!

I HOPE OL' EKIMUS HAS A PLAN...



MY ONLY PLAN, JOSEPH, IS TO STOP LISSETH FOREVER... OR DIE IN THE ATTEMPT!

ONWARD!



WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH THAT DRAGON'S BLOOD, JOE? THIS IS NO TIME TO THINK OF YOUR APPETITES!

I'M NOT. IF WE'RE GOING INTO BATTLE THEN I'M GONNA BE PROPERLY DRESSED...



WELL THEN, IF CUSTOM IS SATISFIED, MAY WE NOW GO HELP PROTECT THE COSMOS?

RIGHT BEHIND YOU, ANGELITA...

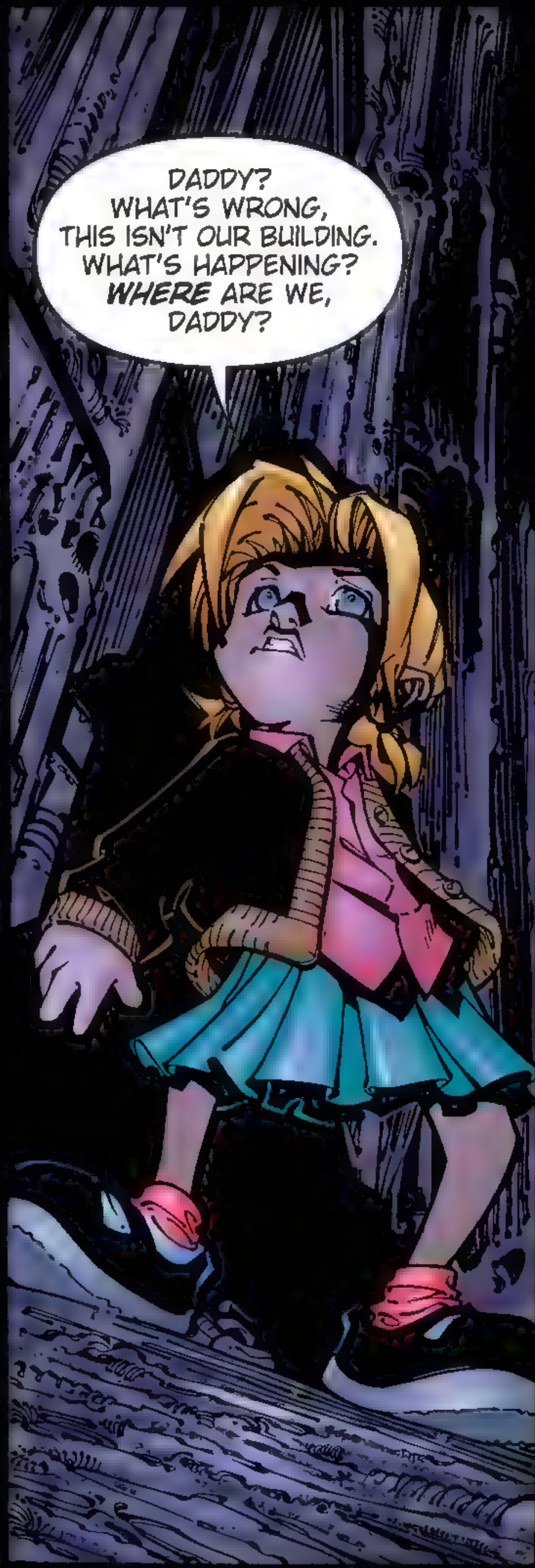
...AND WITH MY PEOPLE, THAT MEANS... **WARPAINT!**



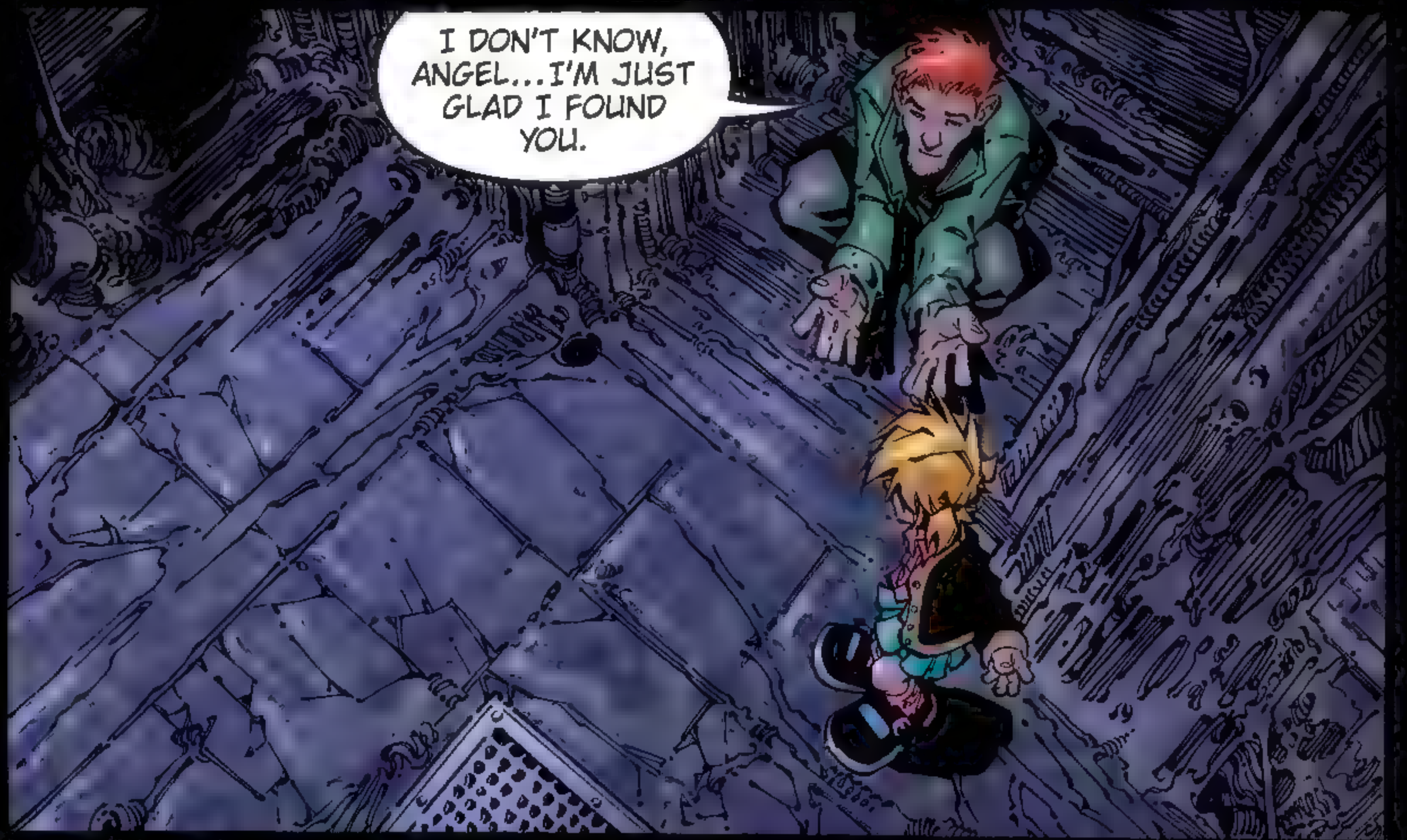
...OR THE INNOCENT OF EARTH WILL PERISH WITHOUT HOPE OF SALVATION!

THERE! BEYOND THAT GLEAMING LIGHT IS THE KEY TO CREATION! WE MUST KEEP IT SAFE FROM LISSETH...!

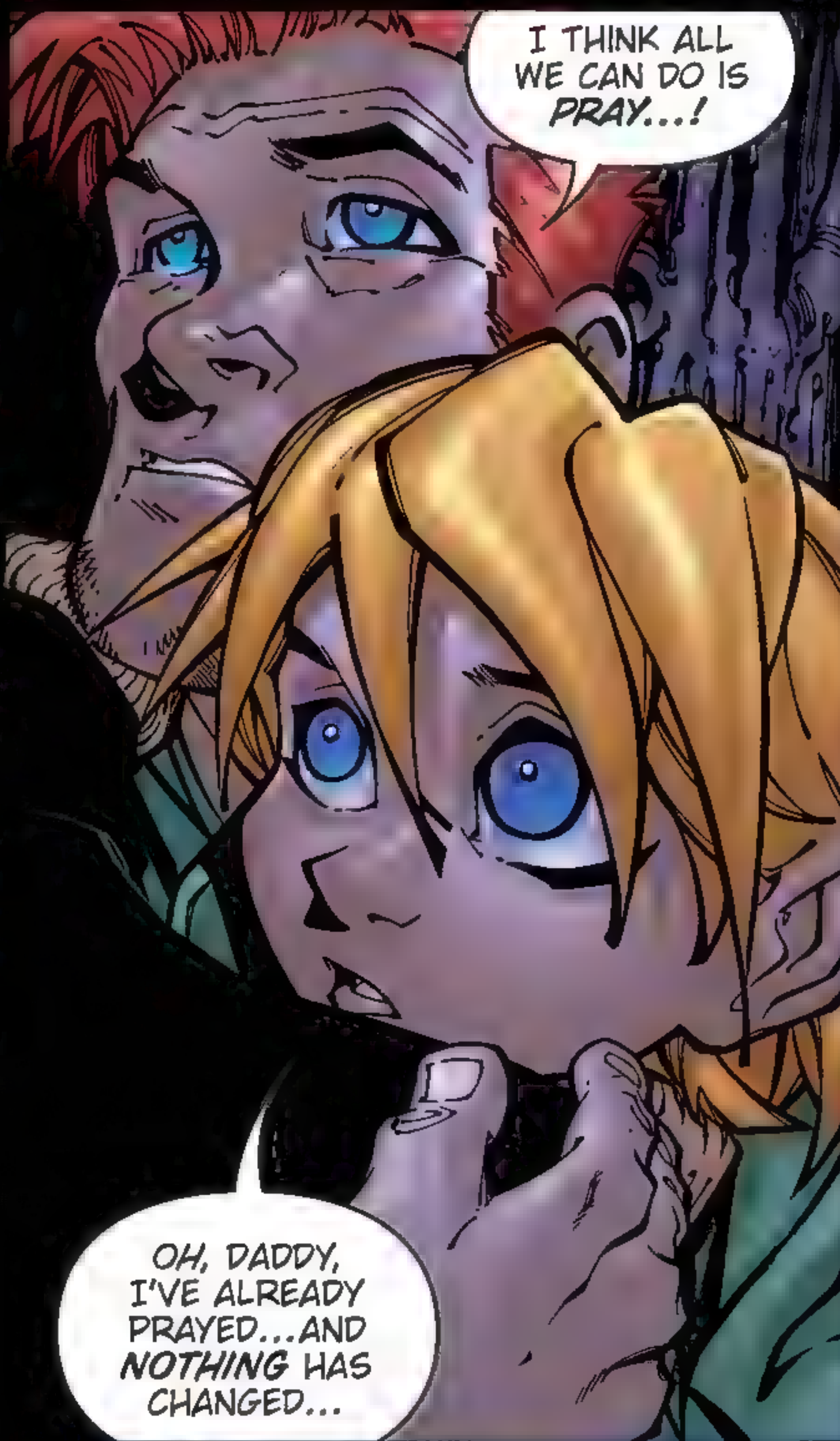
...DADDY?



DADDY?
WHAT'S WRONG,
THIS ISN'T OUR BUILDING.
WHAT'S HAPPENING?
WHERE ARE WE,
DADDY?

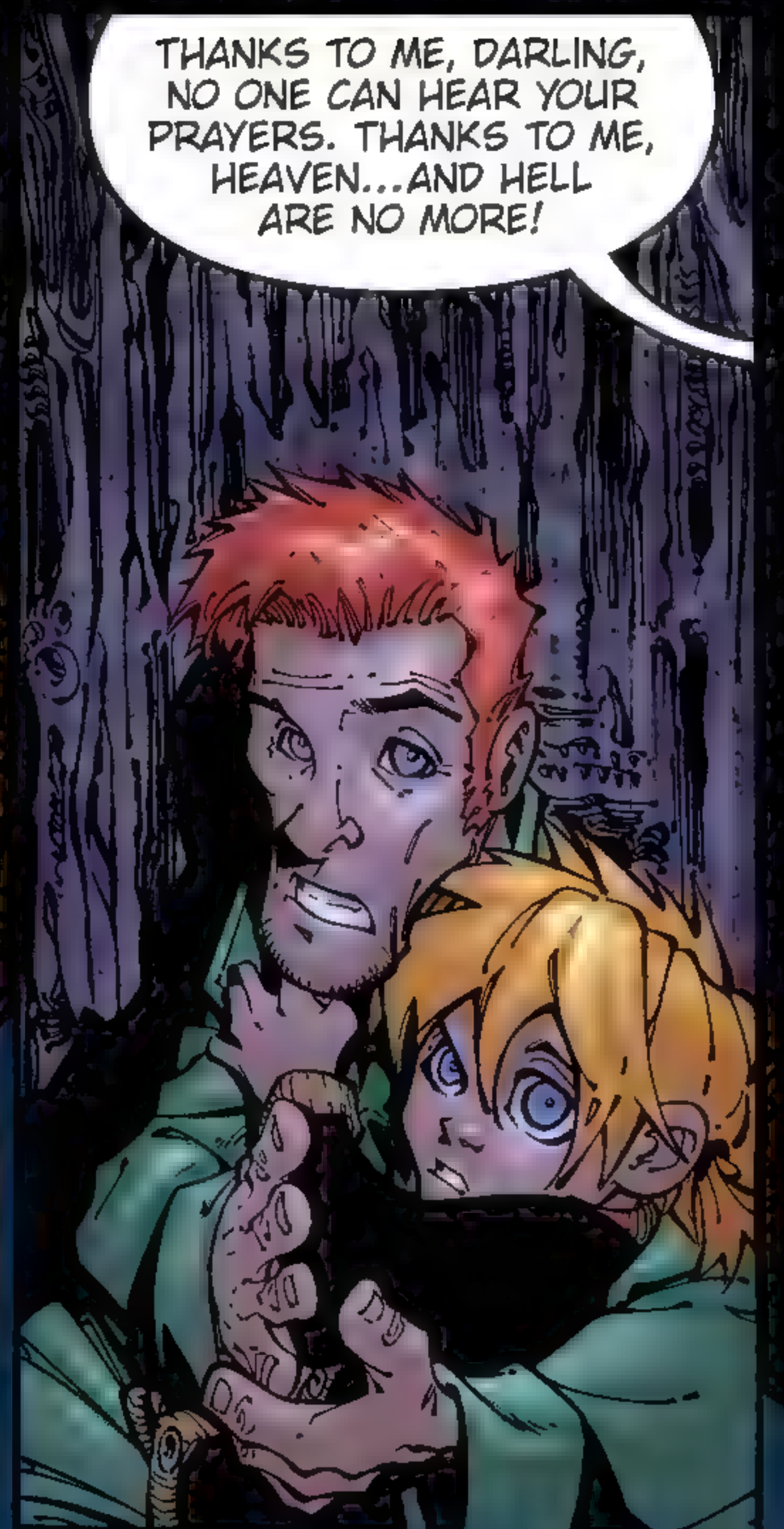


I DON'T KNOW,
ANGEL...I'M JUST
GLAD I FOUND
YOU.



I THINK ALL
WE CAN DO IS
PRAY...!

OH, DADDY,
I'VE ALREADY
PRAYED...AND
NOTHING HAS
CHANGED...



THANKS TO ME, DARLING,
NO ONE CAN HEAR YOUR
PRAYERS. THANKS TO ME,
HEAVEN...AND HELL
ARE NO MORE!



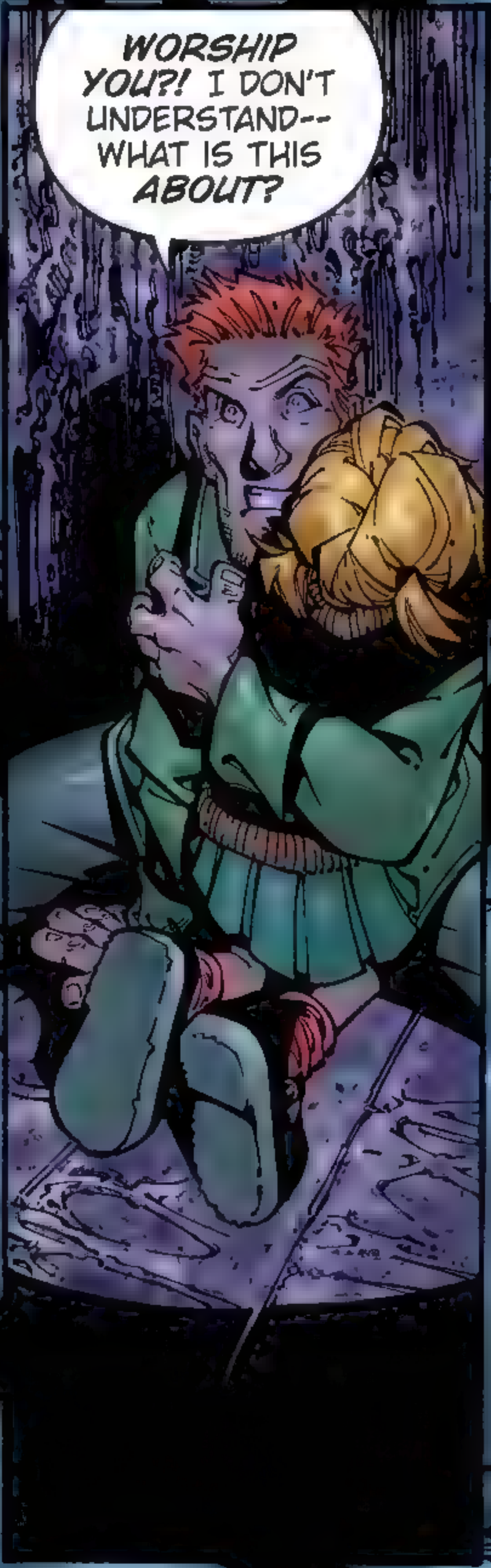
H-HOW
COULD THAT BE?!
WH-WHO ARE
YOU?

I AM
DARKNESS AND
DESPAIR. THERE IS
NO LONGER ANY GOD,
ANY DEVIL...ANY
HOPE! ONLY I HEAR
YOU NOW...

...AND
I DON'T
CARE!



FALL DOWN
AND WORSHIP ME,
THOUGH, AND I
MIGHT LET YOU
SURVIVE...



WORSHIP
YOU?! I DON'T
UNDERSTAND--
WHAT IS THIS
ABOUT?



I AM THE
ONLY REALITY IN THE
COSMOS...THE ALPHA, THE
OMEGA...I AM ETERNITY
AND OBLIVION! WORSHIP
ME AND LIVE.



DAMN YOU--
NO!



HMM...? I OFFER
LIFE OVER DESOLATION,
IN EXCHANGE FOR A
SIMPLE ACT OF
WORSHIP AND YOU
REFUSE?!



YOU DIDN'T
EVEN HAVE TO
MEAN IT! AH, WELL,
BEGONE!

AAAAARRGGH



DAD-DEEE!

ASHES TO
ASHES...



NOW,
CERTAINLY,
YOU WON'T
REFUSE--?
WORSHIP
ME.

NEVER!



AMAZING.
EVEN UNDER THE
THREAT OF OBLIVION,
THEY PERSIST IN THEIR
REJECTION. COULD I
HAVE UNDERESTIMATED
HUMAN STRENGTH
AND WILL...?

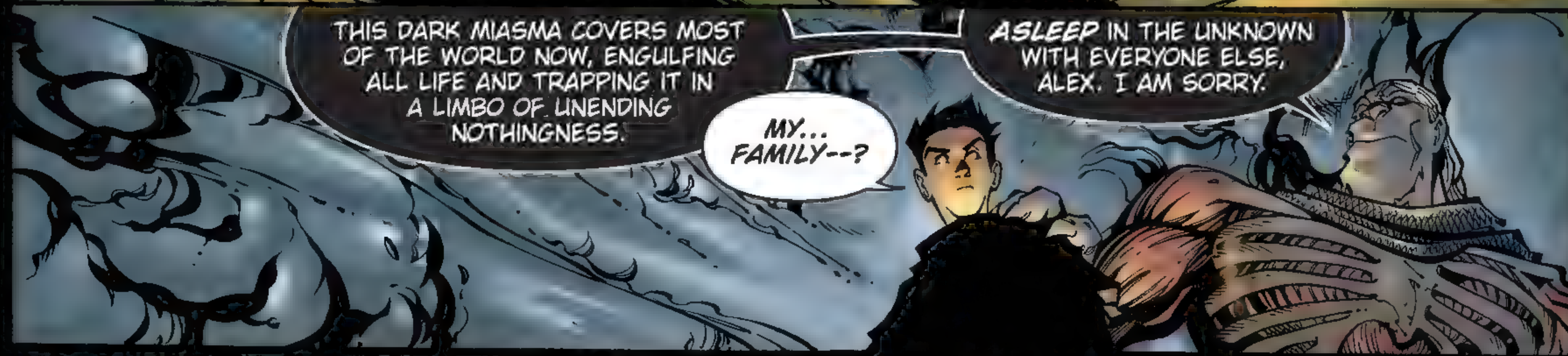
NO,
THAT CAN'T
BE!



IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL.

YES, ALEX.
ALL THE MORE
REASON THAT WE
MUST DO EVERYTHING
TO KEEP IT *SAFE*
FROM LISSETH'S
SPREADING
CORRUPTION.

THIS BLACK
BITTERNESS HAS
POURED FORTH FROM
HER EVIL HEART. *IT* IS THE
SUBSTANCE OF HER
TWISTED DREAMS
MADE REAL!



THIS DARK MIASMA COVERS MOST
OF THE WORLD NOW, ENGULFING
ALL LIFE AND TRAPPING IT IN
A LIMBO OF UNENDING
NOTHINGNESS.

MY...
FAMILY--?

ASLEEP IN THE UNKNOWN
WITH EVERYONE ELSE,
ALEX. I AM SORRY.



BUT
WE SHALL DO
EVERYTHING TO
END HER NIGHTMARE,
YOU HAVE MY *WORD*.
NOW, BE ALERT.

EKIMUS--!
IT'S COMING
FOR US!





WRONG
AGAIN!

WHOOOOOM

IT CAN BE HURT!
FIGHT BACK--WITH
ALL YOU'VE
GOT!!

MY DARKNESS FEELS
NOTHING. THE BOY
IS STRONG,
THOUGH...

I'M COMING
FOR YOU,
LISSETH!!

HMMM, WE
CAN'T HAVE
THAT...



HAHAHA!

HEY--!

WE CAN'T
KEEP HACKING
AT THIS INFERNAL
STUFF--WE HAVEN'T
THE STRENGTH OR
NUMBERS!

Fwooooosh

WE MUST
FIGHT THIS
DARKNESS WITH
THE ONLY THING
THAT WILL
DESTROY IT
UTTERLY--

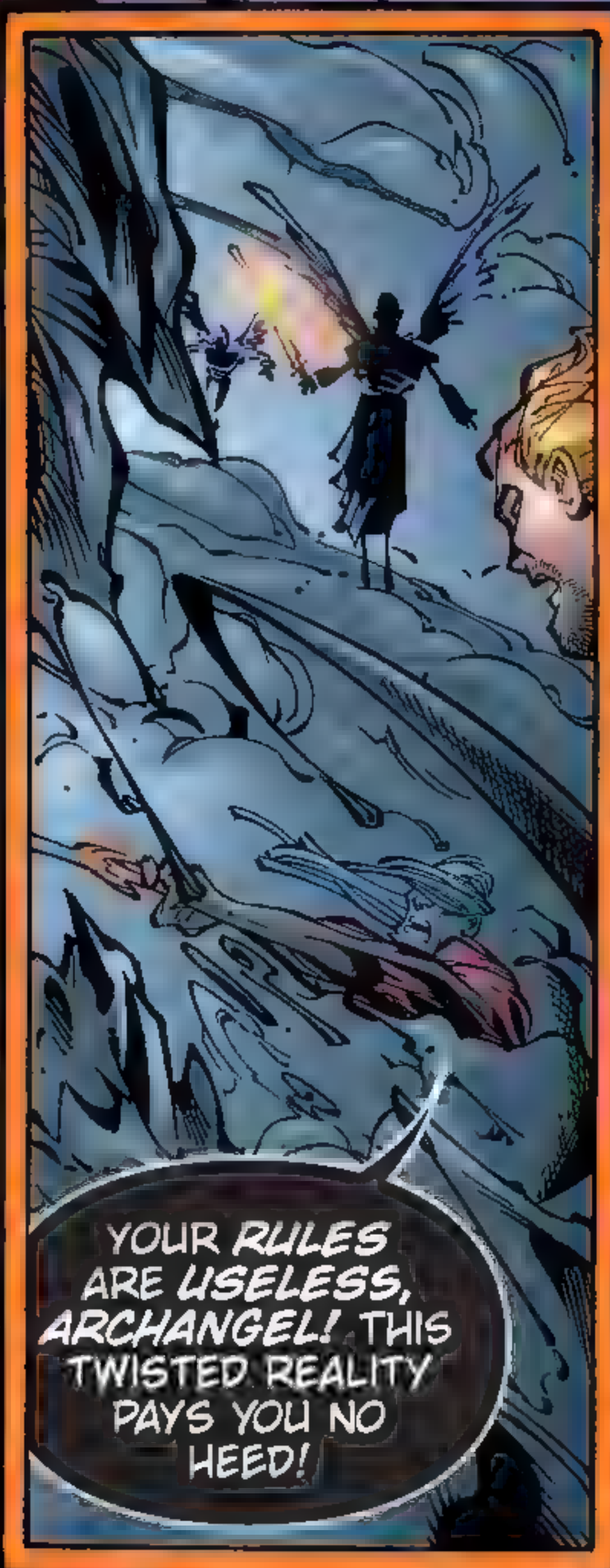
LIGHT!!!

THIS...
THIS IS
BAD.

ALEX HAS
GIVEN US AN
EDGE--PRESS
ONWARD!



HOLD, EKIMUS--IT IS NOT YET *TIME*! THERE ARE *RULES* AND *PROPHECIES* TO OBSERVE.



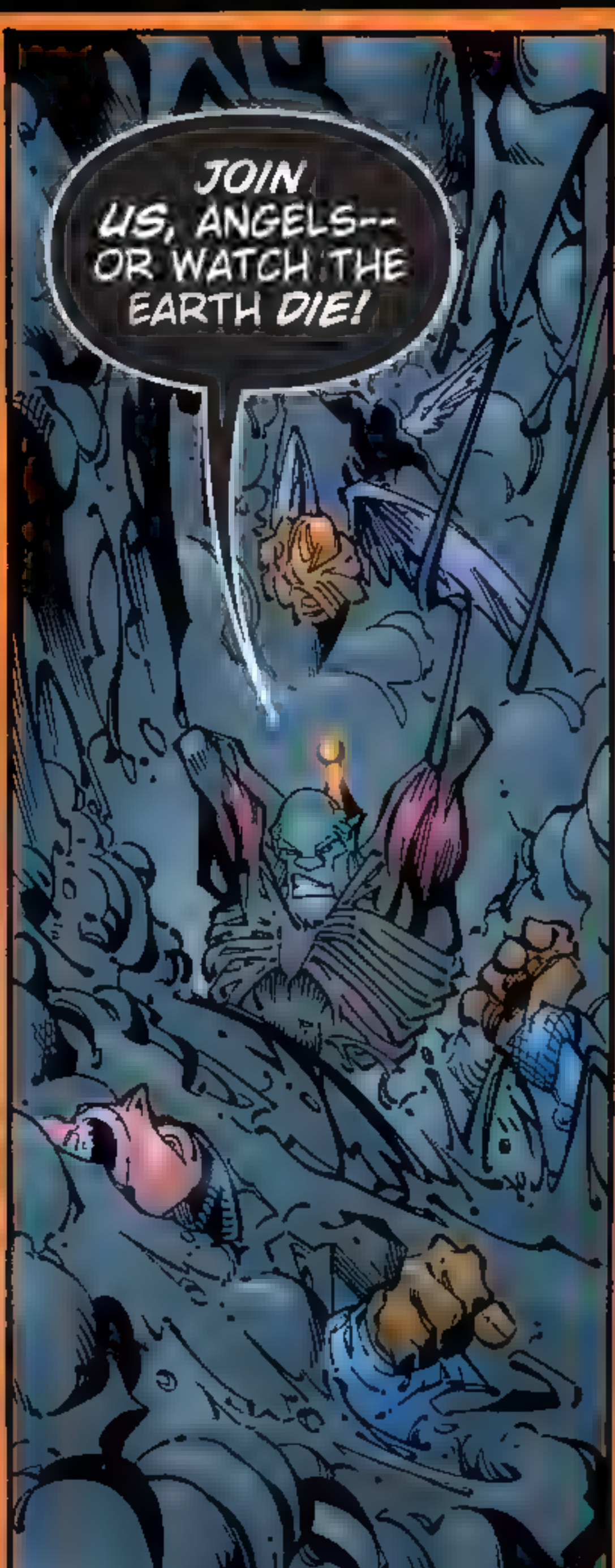
YOUR *RULES* ARE *USELESS*, ARCHANGEL! THIS TWISTED REALITY PAYS YOU NO HEED!



THE DARKNESS WILL ENGULF AND DESTROY US ALL, UNLESS WE STOP LISSETH *NOW*!



NOW LIKE IN TEN MINUTES AGO!



JOIN US, ANGELS--OR WATCH THE EARTH DIE!



WHERE ARE YOU, BITCH--?!

TSK-TSK...!

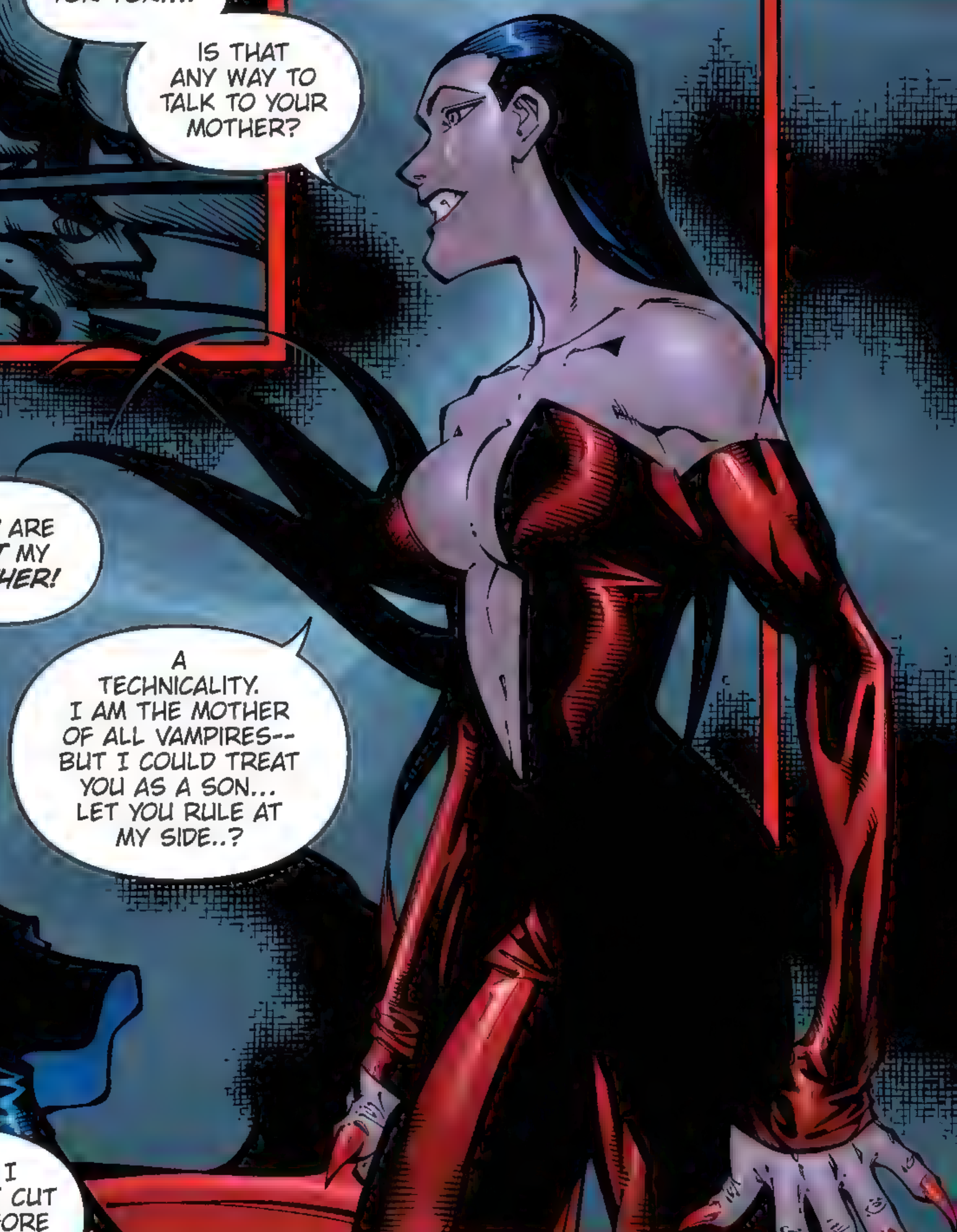
IS THAT ANY WAY TO TALK TO YOUR MOTHER?



YOU ARE NOT MY MOTHER!

A TECHNICALITY. I AM THE MOTHER OF ALL VAMPIRES-- BUT I COULD TREAT YOU AS A SON... LET YOU RULE AT MY SIDE..?

OR MAYBE I SHOULD JUST CUT YOU OFF, BEFORE YOU BECOME A THREAT!



YAAAAHHH--!

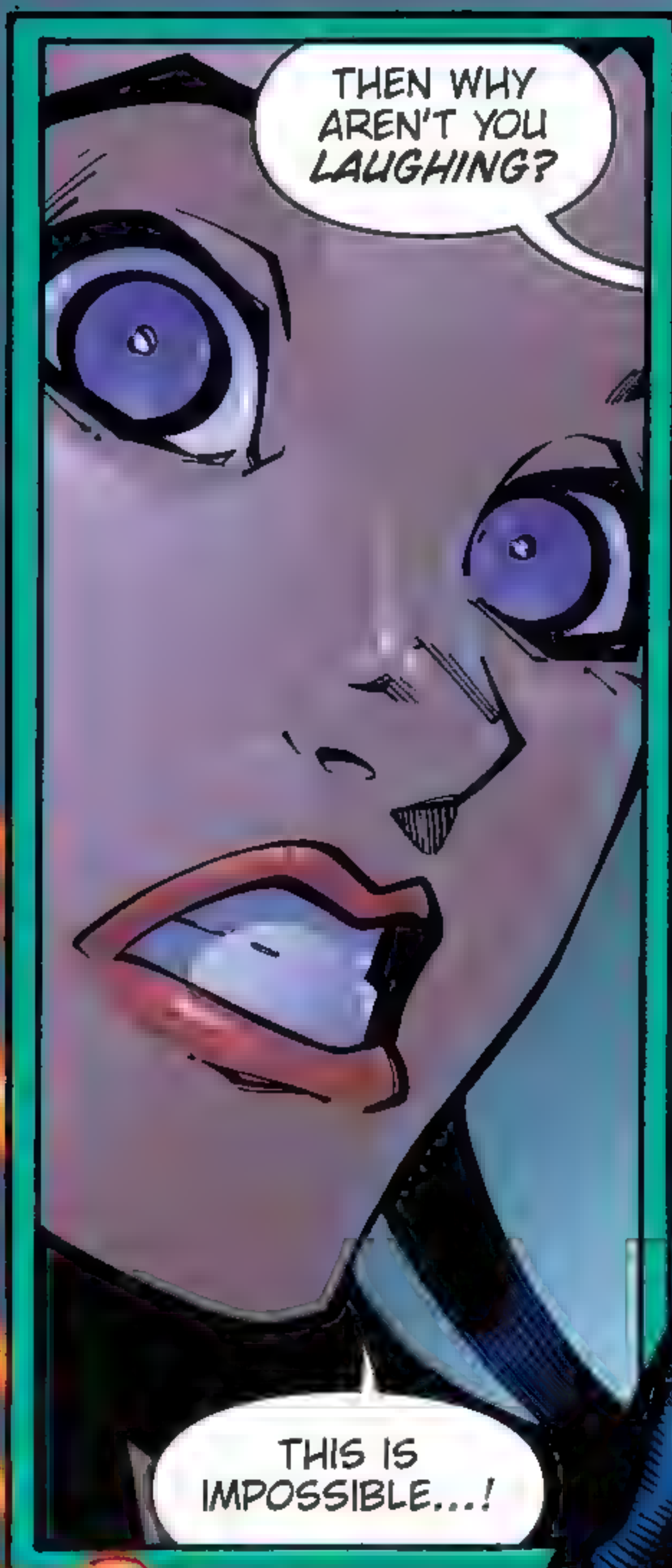
SKLASH!



GUHHHHHH--?



YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO BE A THREAT TO ME, BOY. YOU'RE A JOKE.



THEN WHY
AREN'T YOU
LAUGHING?

THIS IS
IMPOSSIBLE...!

APPARENTLY
NOT. I REALLY
AM THE CHOSEN
ONE, IT SEEMS...AND I
FINALLY UNDERSTAND
WHAT I'VE BEEN
CHOSEN FOR...



...TO
DESTROY
YOU!

AAAAAGH!



AIEE--!

SUCH...
PAIN...
HOW--?!!



I-I-AHHHH--

YOU'RE
GOOD,
KID...

THUMP

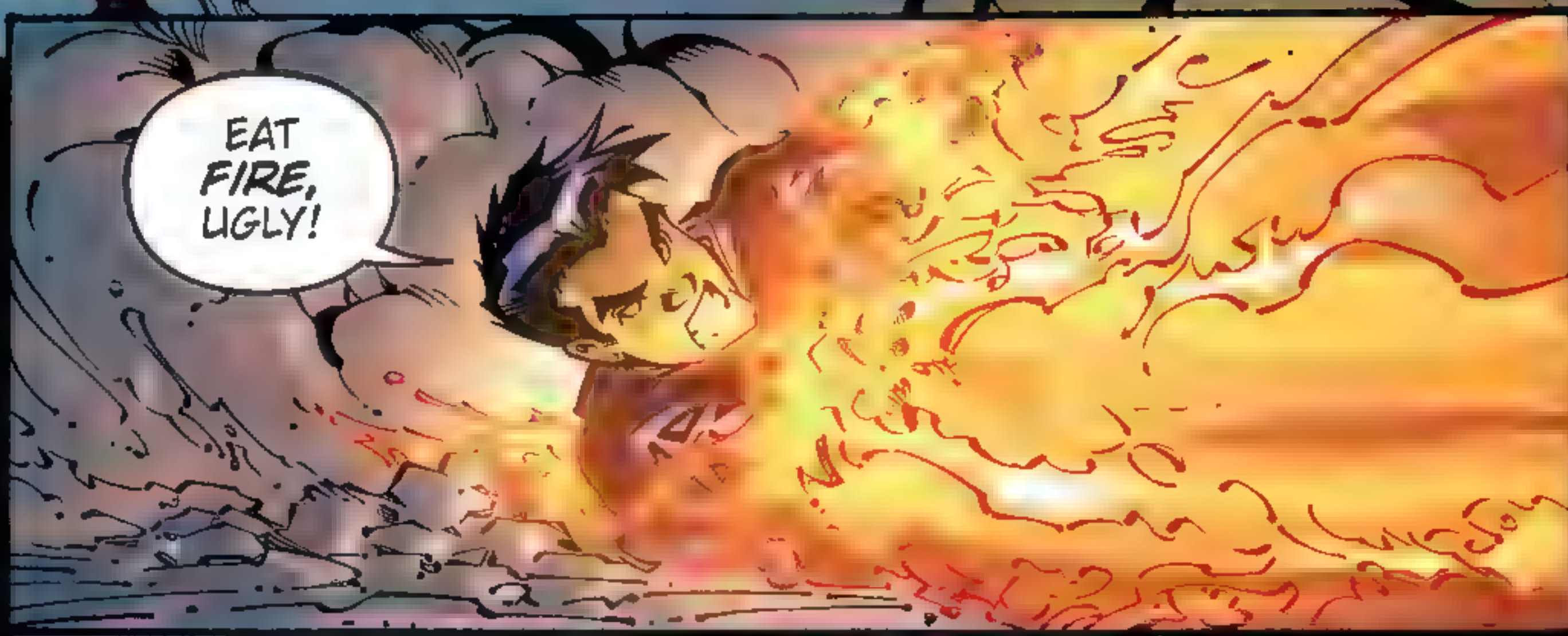


...THE REAL
DEAL, EVEN. GO
ON, CHOSEN
ONE, FINISH
HER OFF.

VAN
FLEET?!

NO! THIS
FOOLISHNESS
HAS GONE ON LONG
ENOUGH! I AM THE
MISTRESS OF ALL
THAT IS! THERE
WILL BE NO MORE
OPPOSITION!

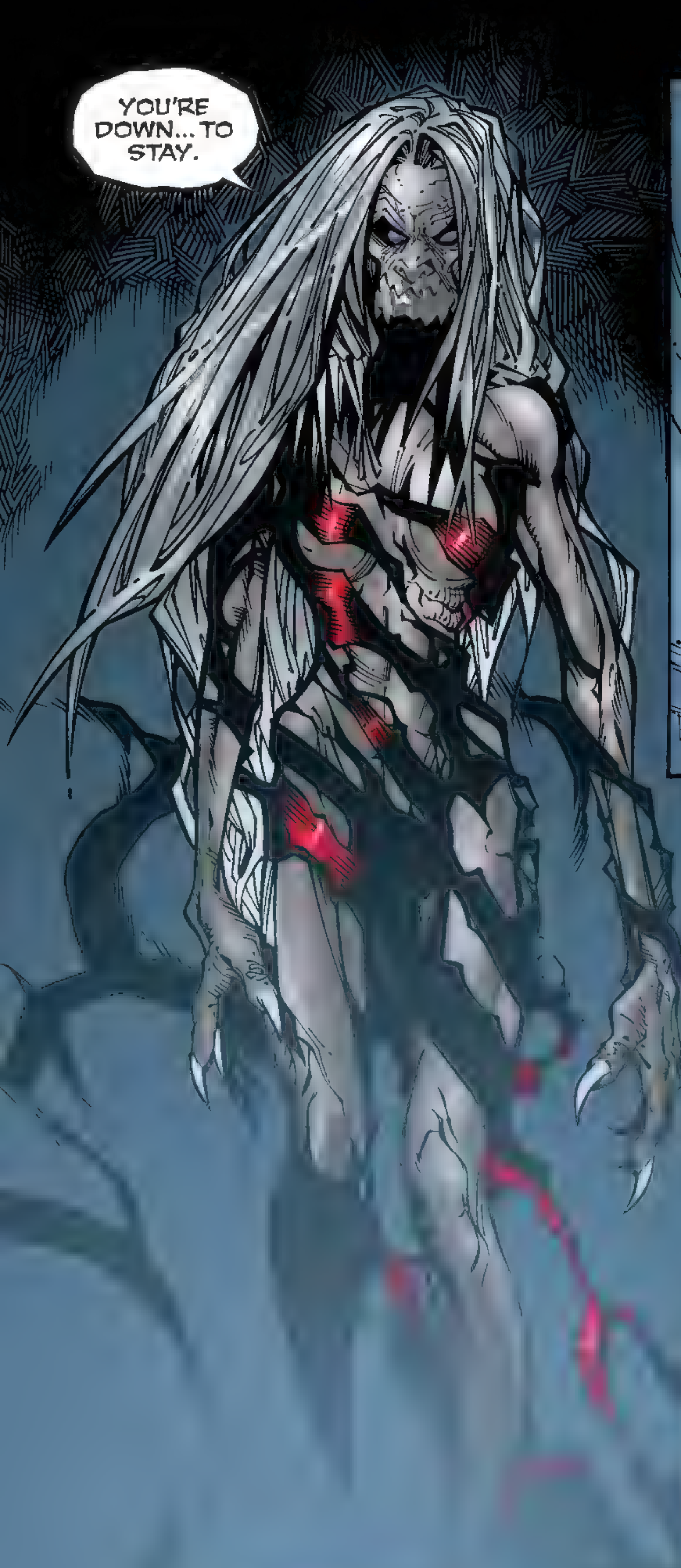
I WILL
NOT ALLOW
IT!!



EAT
FIRE,
UGLY!



NO--
PUT ME
DOWN!



YOU'RE
DOWN... TO
STAY.



IF THE BOY
IS HARMED,
I WILL MURDER
YOU MYSELF,
LISSETH!

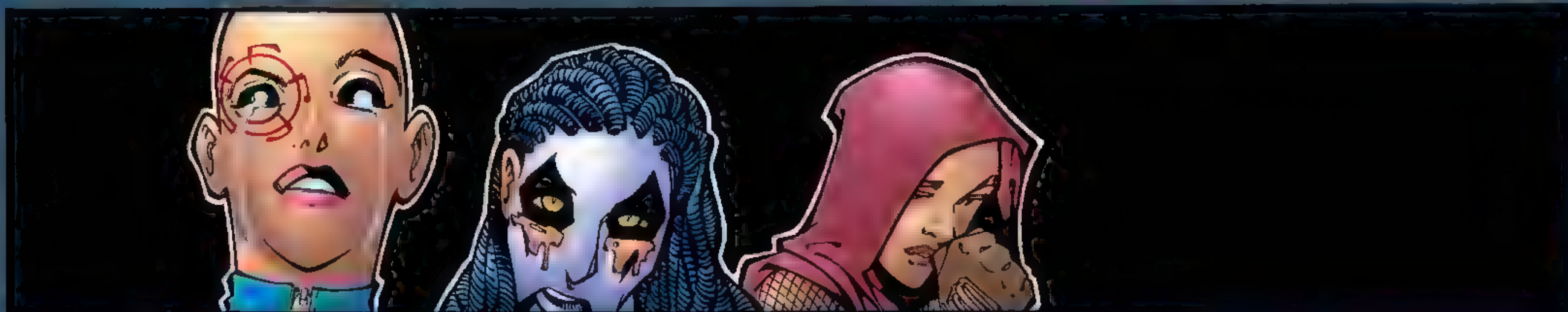
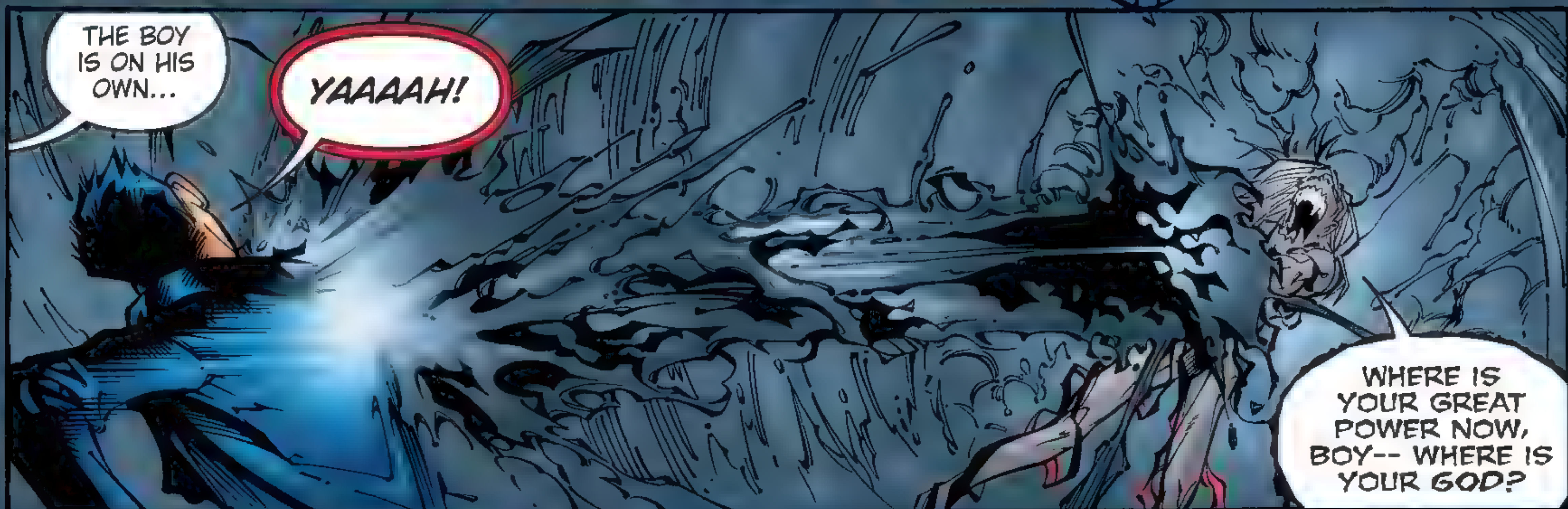


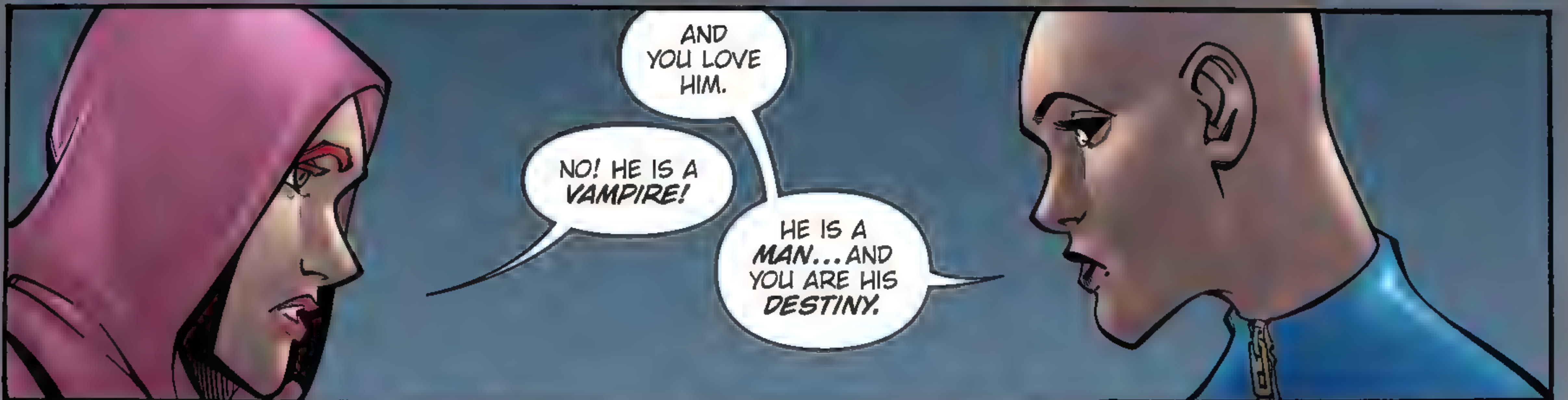
STOP--YOU
KNOW HE MUST
DEFEAT HER ON
HIS OWN.

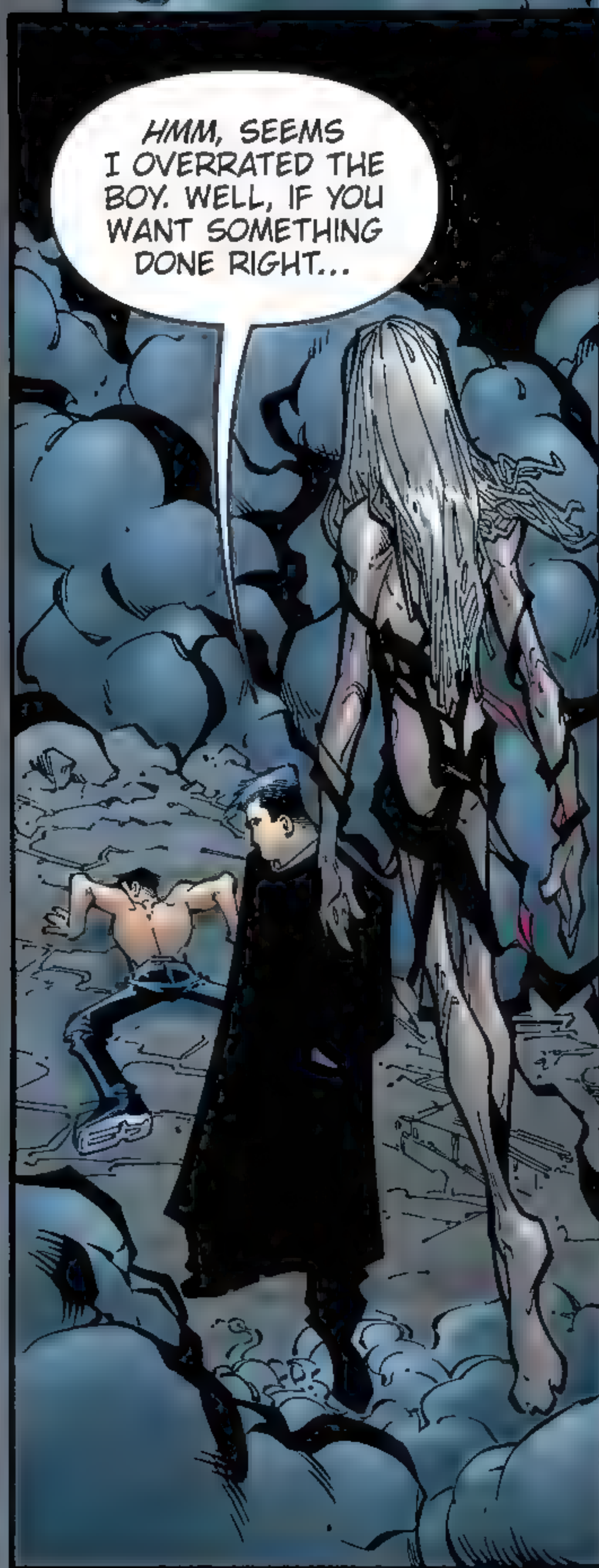
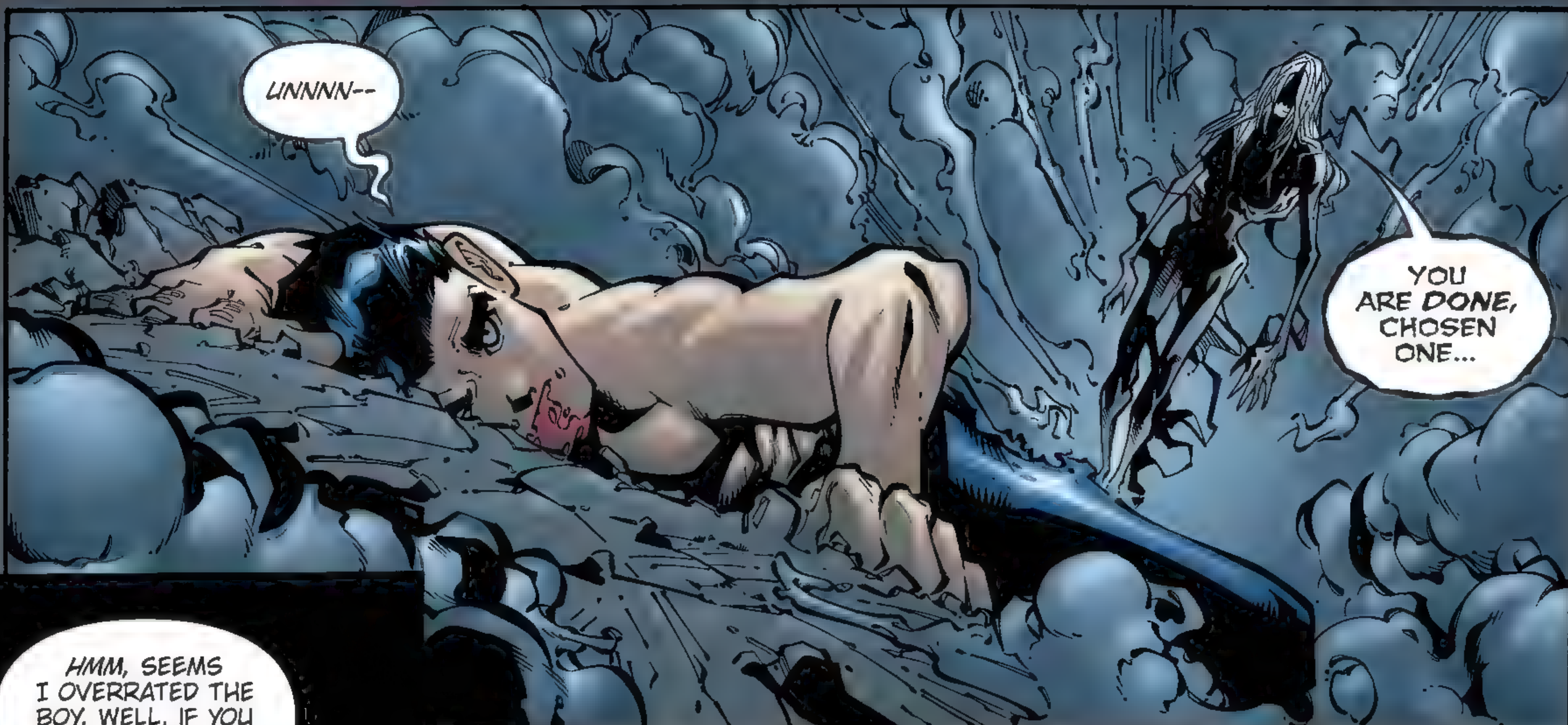


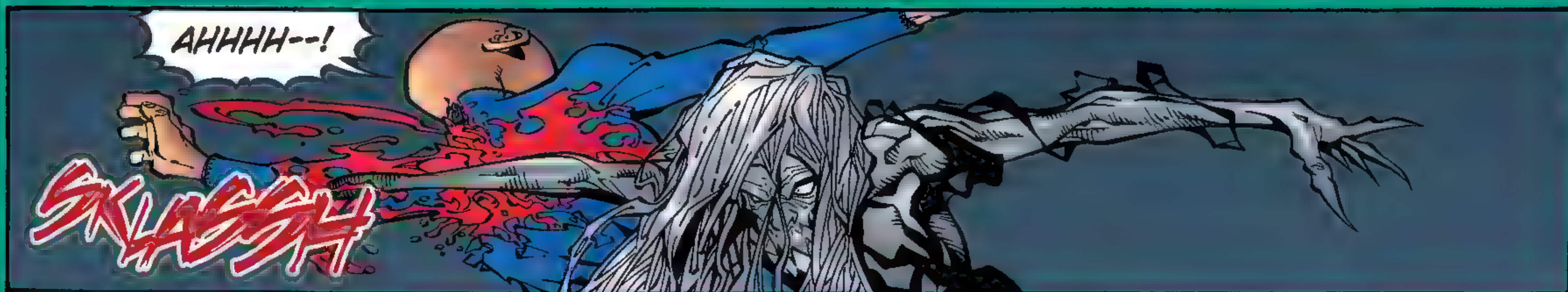
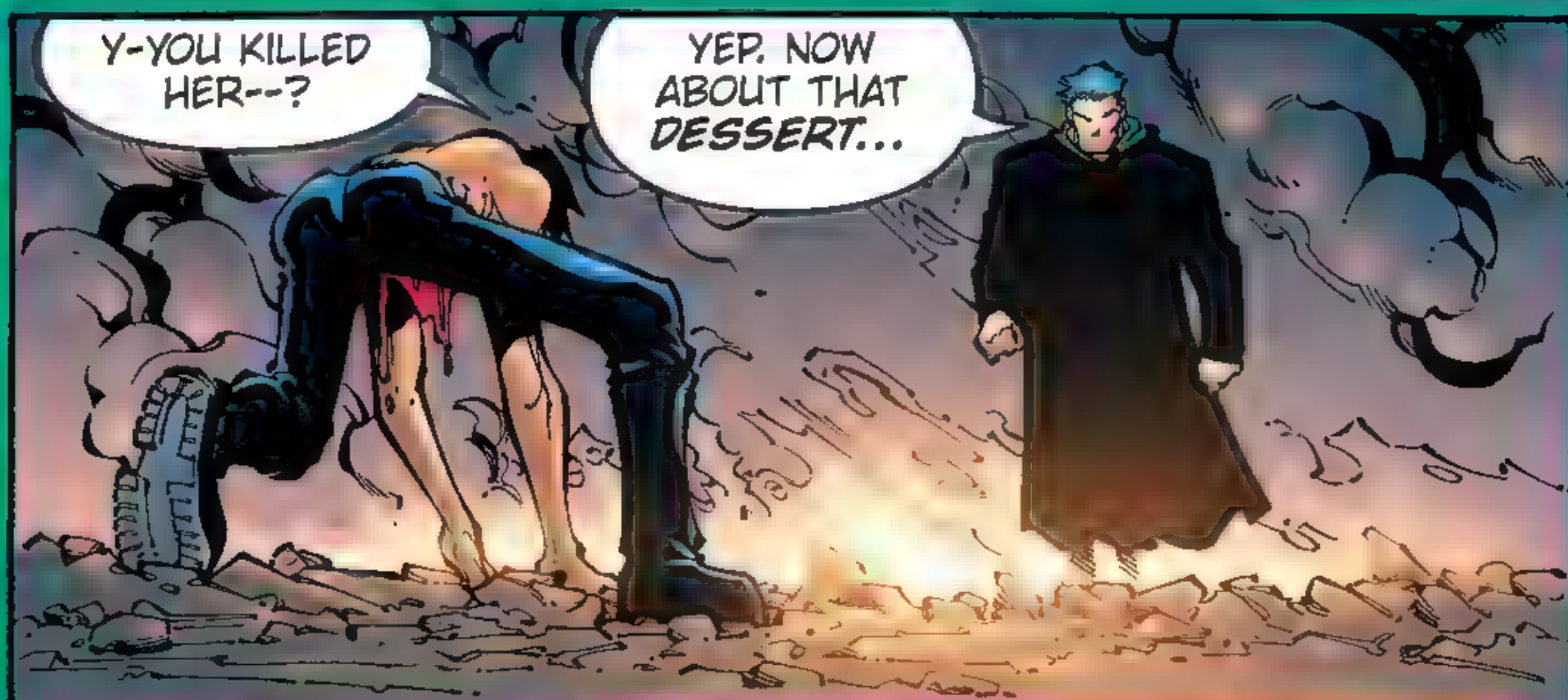
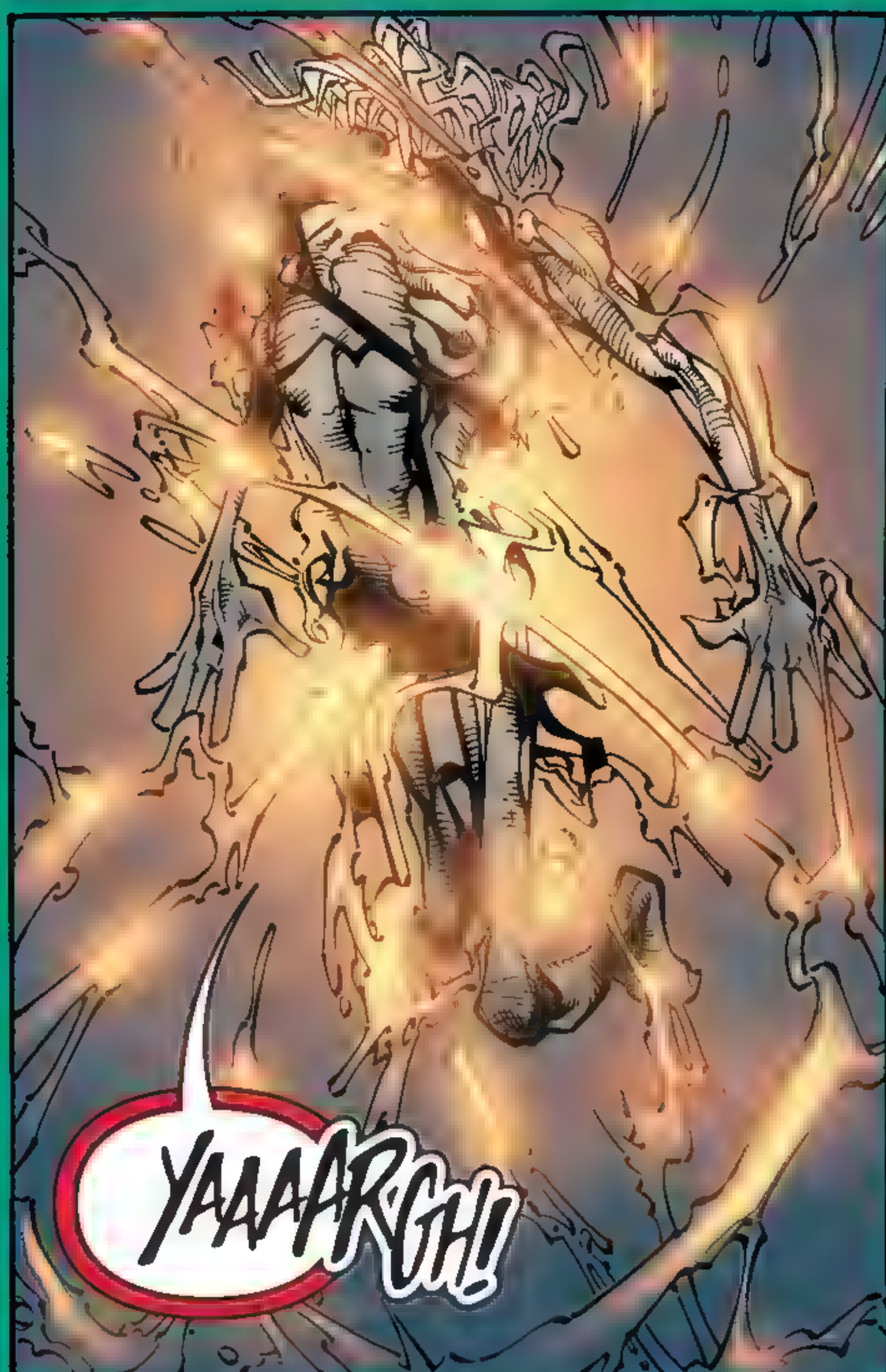
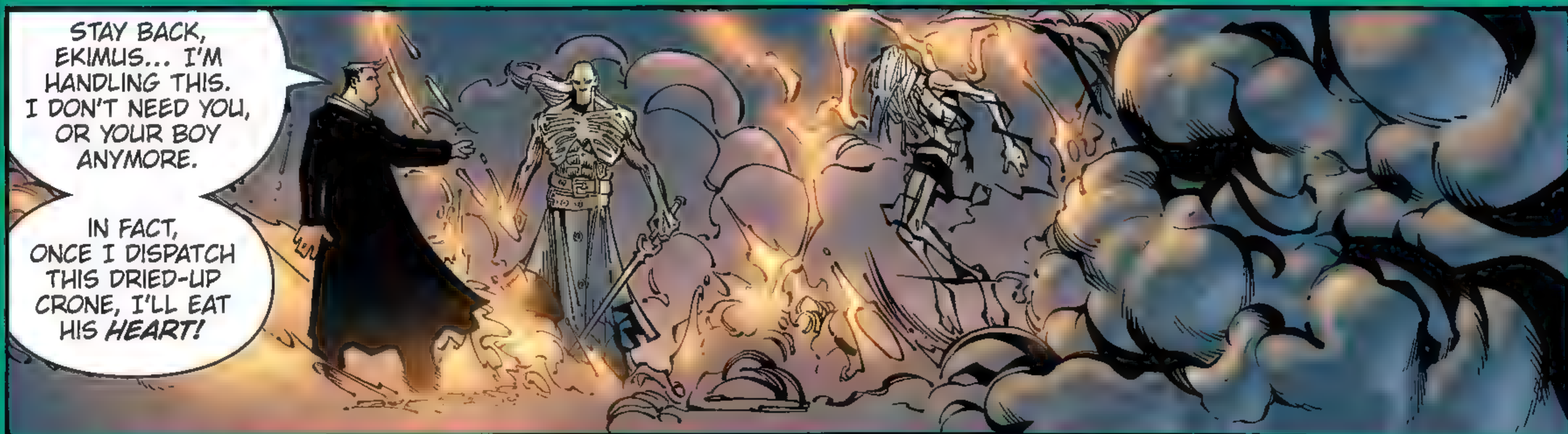
IT IS
WRITTEN.



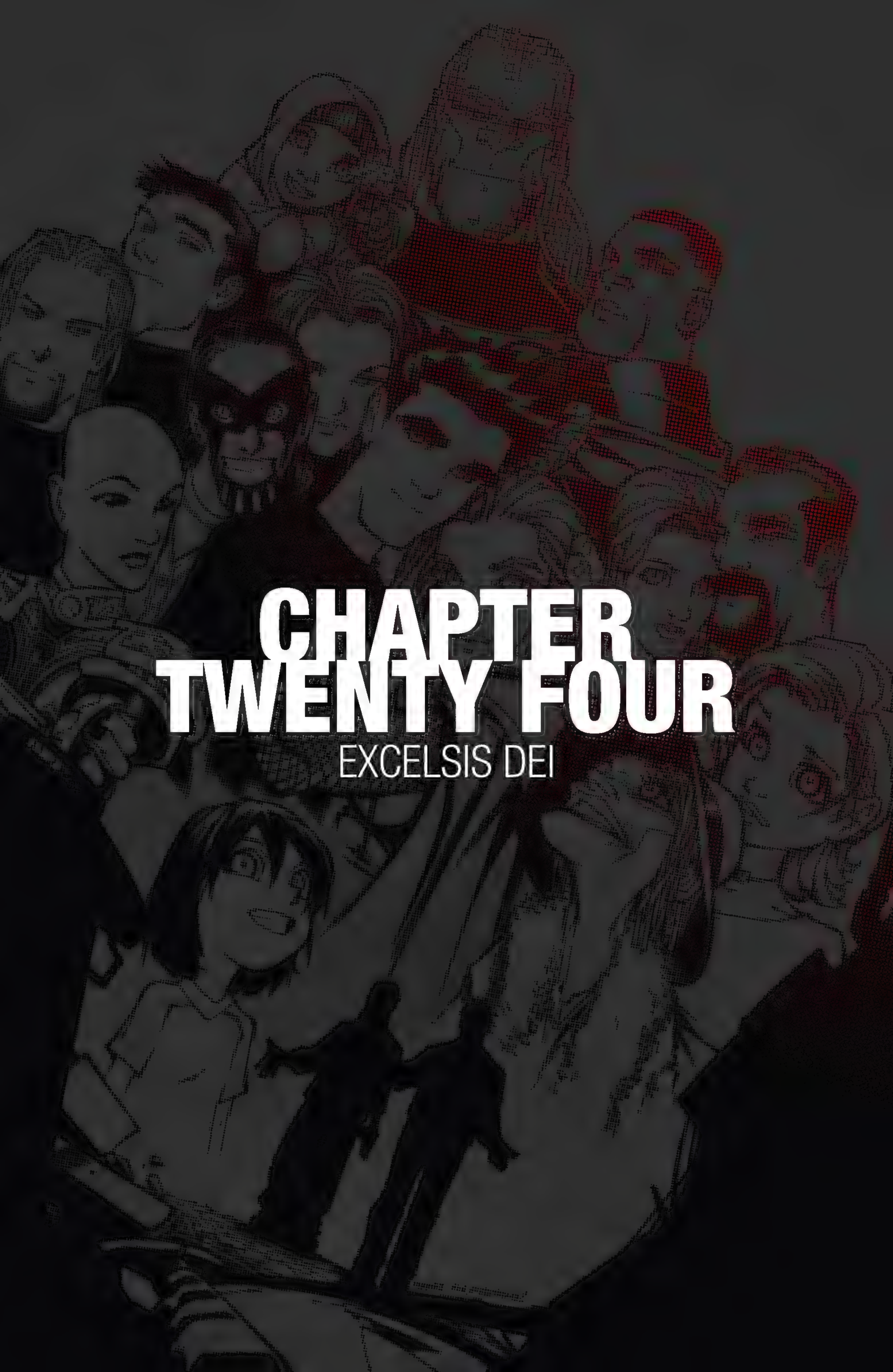






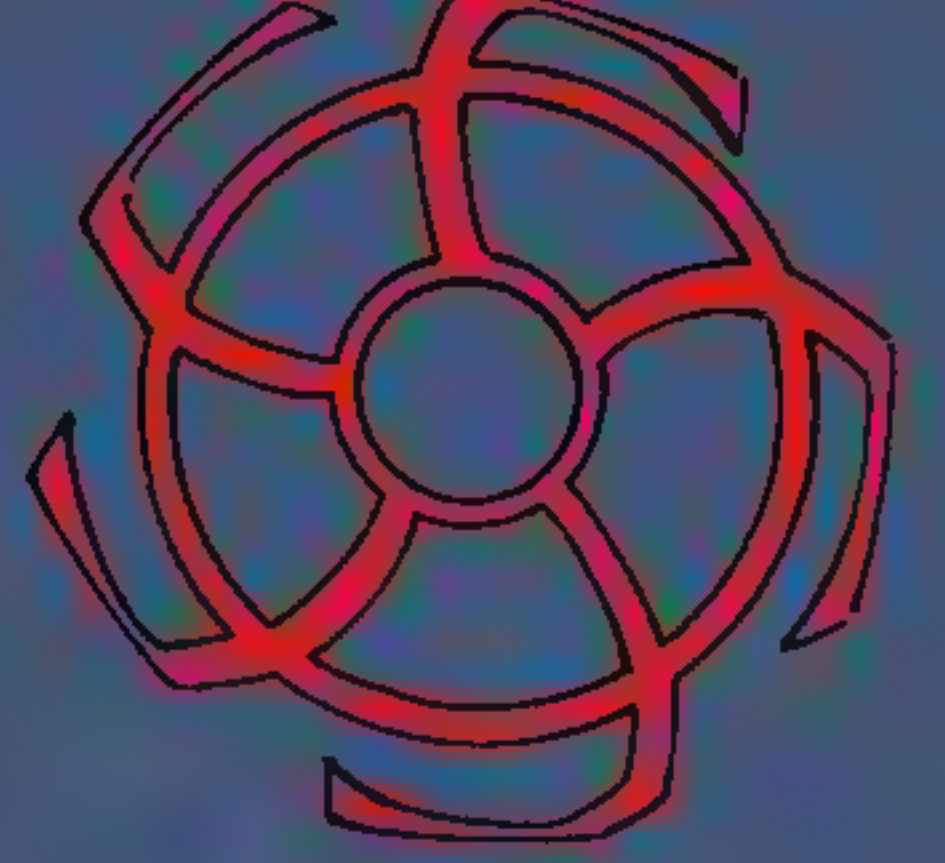






CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

EXCELSIS DEI



The end of the Earth...

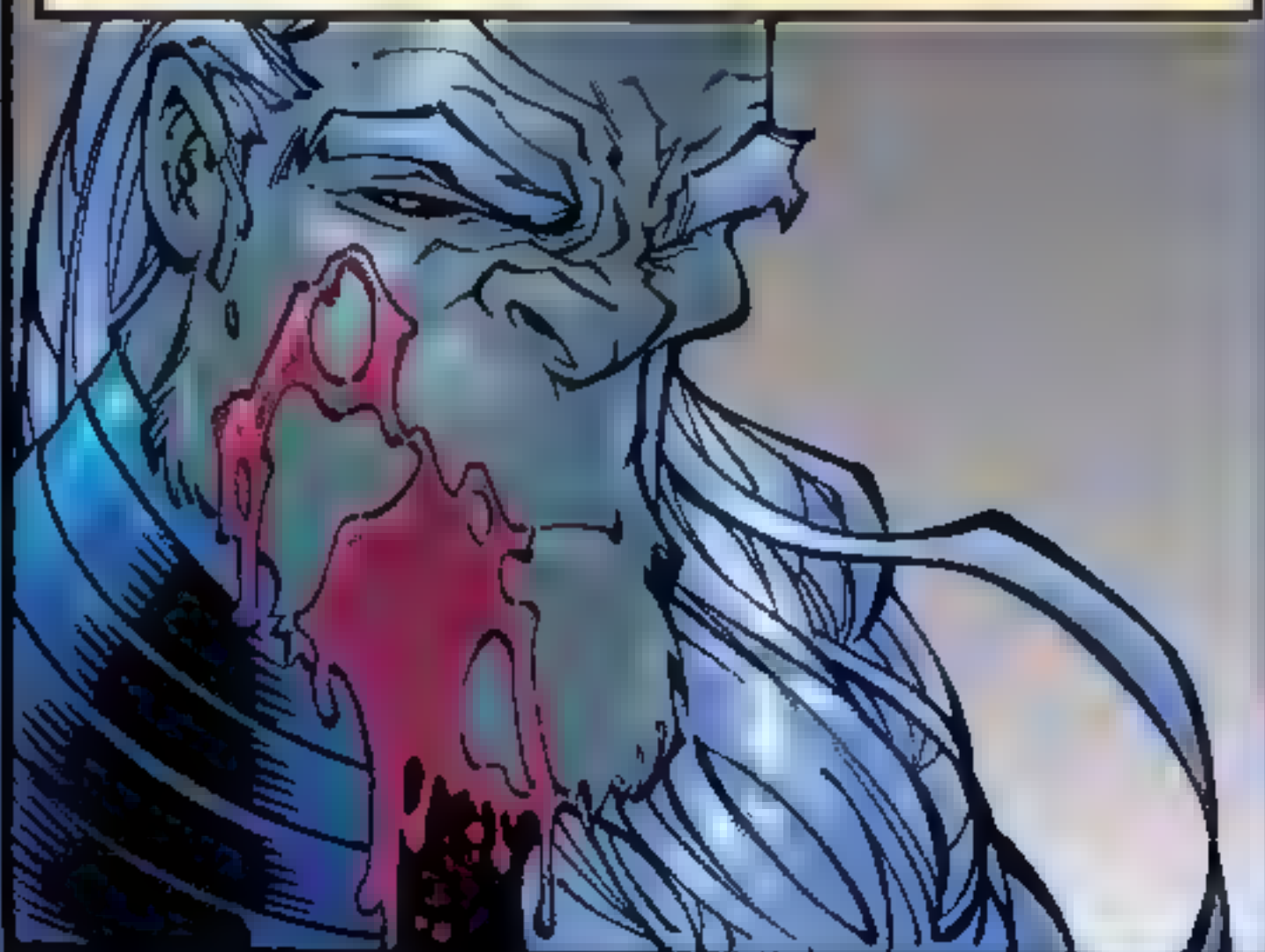
...Unknowable eons ago.

The war between Heaven and Hell is over.

Hell has lost.



IN THE TOO-SHORT LIFE OF THIS NEWEST OF WORLDS, THE GRIGORI HAS ALREADY SEEN TOO MUCH...



YOU WERE SAYING...?



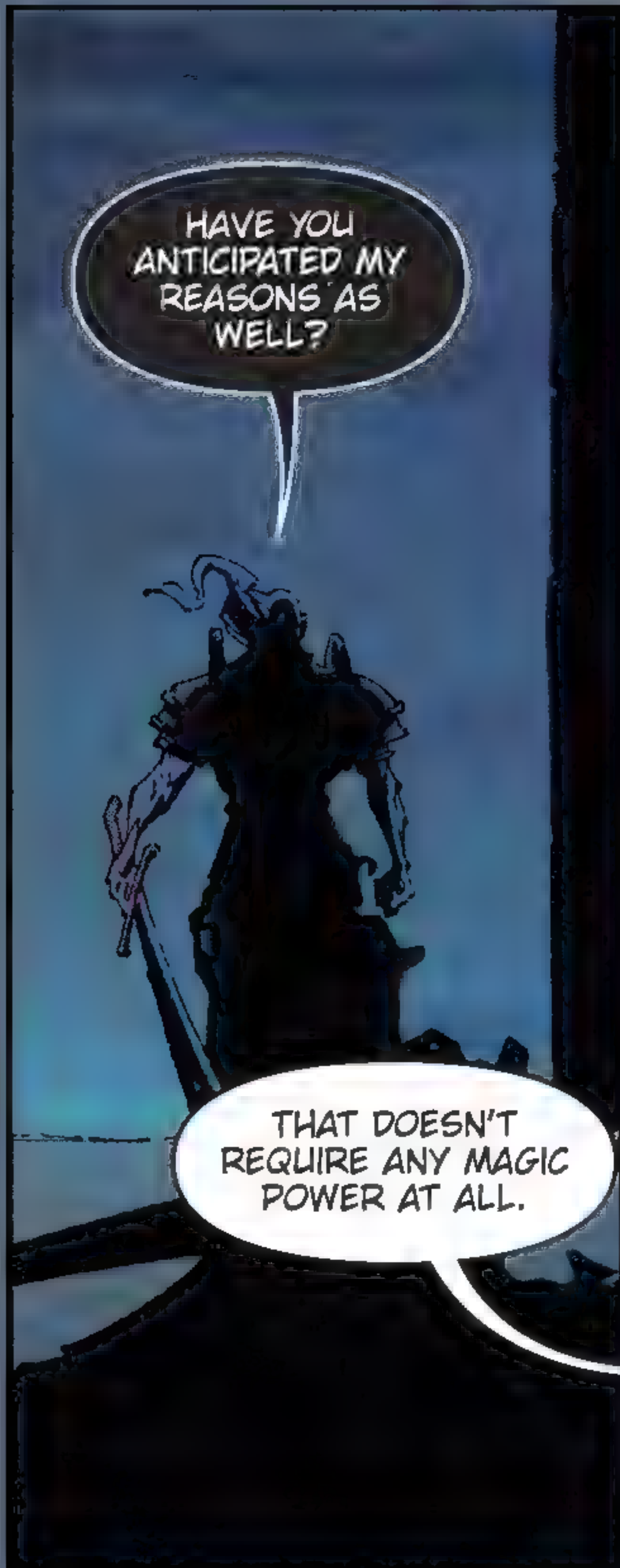
NO...NEVER MIND...THIS WAS FOLLY. IF I HADN'T DESTROYED MY *ETERNAL SOUL*, I'D PROBABLY JOIN YOU IN A LAUGH.

HELLO, CYGNUS, I'M HERE TO SEE *MASTER LUCIFER*.





COME IN, OLD FRIEND... I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU.



HAVE YOU ANTICIPATED MY REASONS AS WELL?

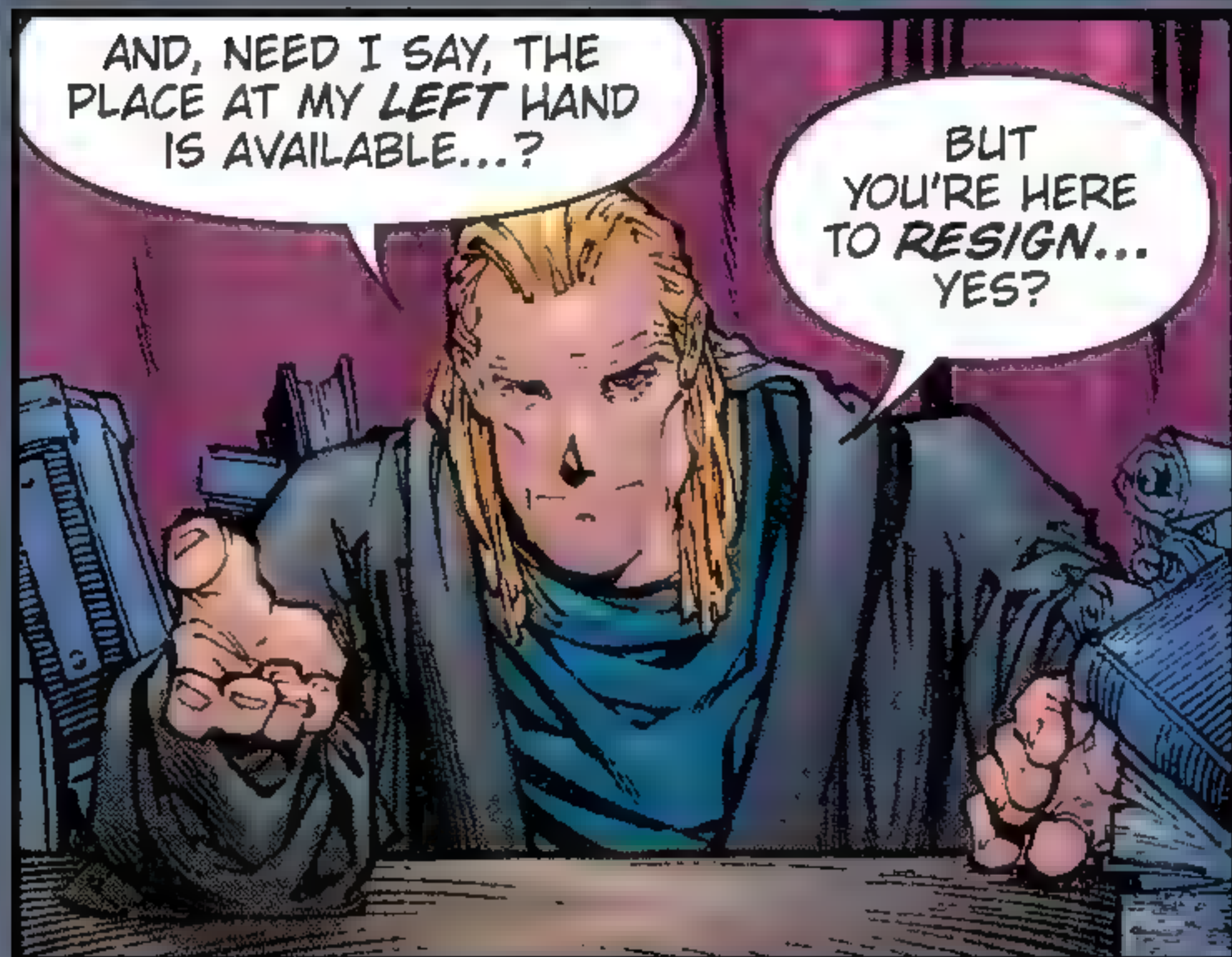
THAT DOESN'T REQUIRE ANY MAGIC POWER AT ALL.



COME IN, COME IN... I'LL BE RIGHT WITH YOU.

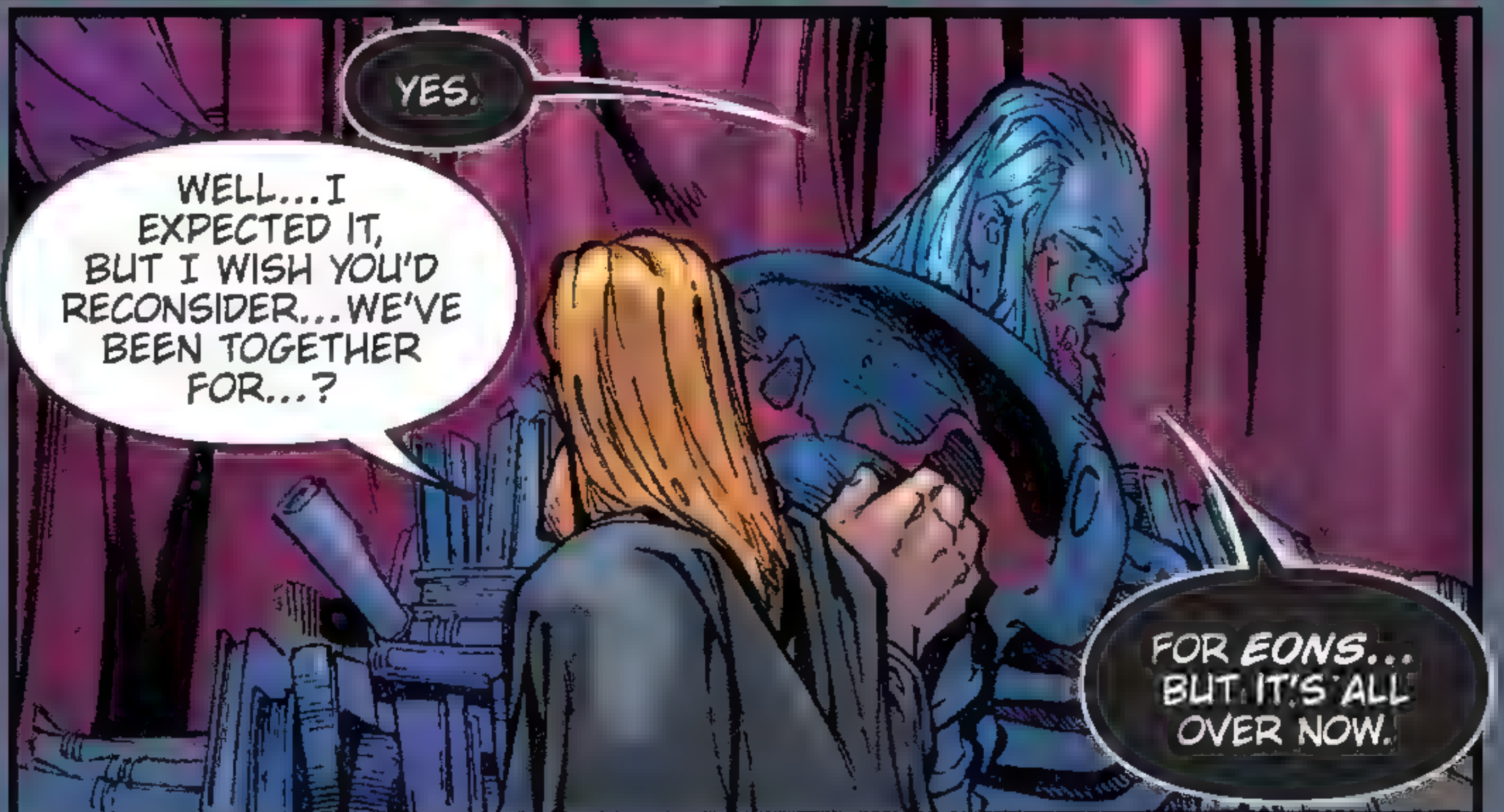
YOU WILL NOT BELIEVE THE *PAPER WORK*. I BELIEVE THAT WILL BE MY *ETERNAL PUNISHMENT*.

BY THE WAY, IN THE *CREATOR'S*... "*MERCY*" THE *UNDERWORLD* HAS BEEN GRANTED US.



AND, NEED I SAY, THE PLACE AT MY *LEFT HAND* IS AVAILABLE...?

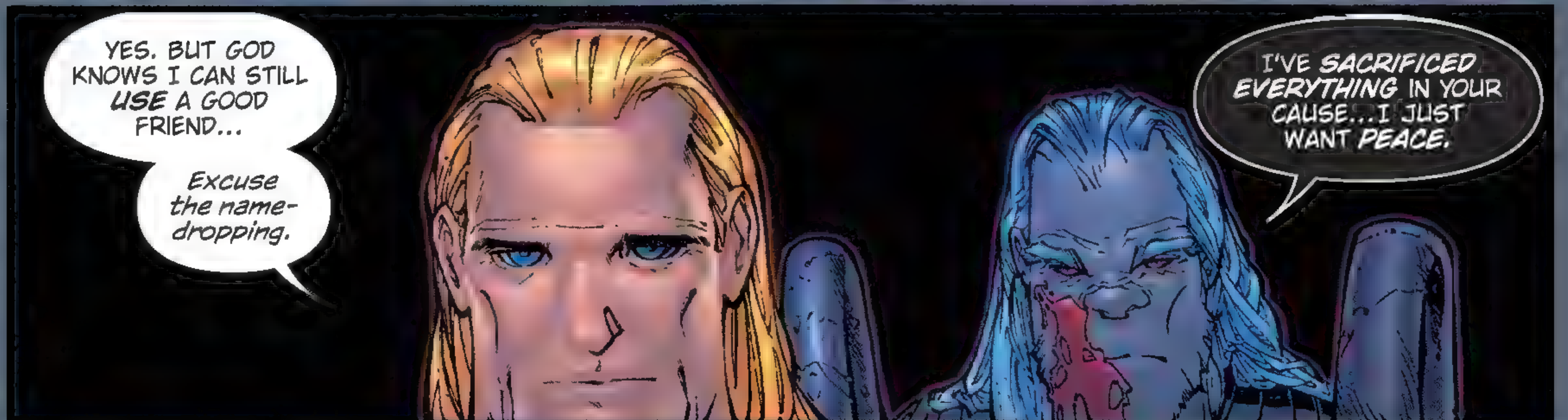
BUT YOU'RE HERE TO *RESIGN*... YES?



YES.

WELL... I EXPECTED IT, BUT I WISH YOU'D RECONSIDER... WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER FOR...?

FOR *EONS*... BUT IT'S ALL OVER NOW.



YES. BUT GOD KNOWS I CAN STILL *USE* A GOOD FRIEND...

Excuse the name-dropping.

I'VE *SACRIFICED EVERYTHING* IN YOUR CAUSE... I JUST WANT *PEACE*.



WHO DOESN'T?
BUT, FOR MY SINS,
I'VE BEEN GIVEN
SOME **JOB**S.

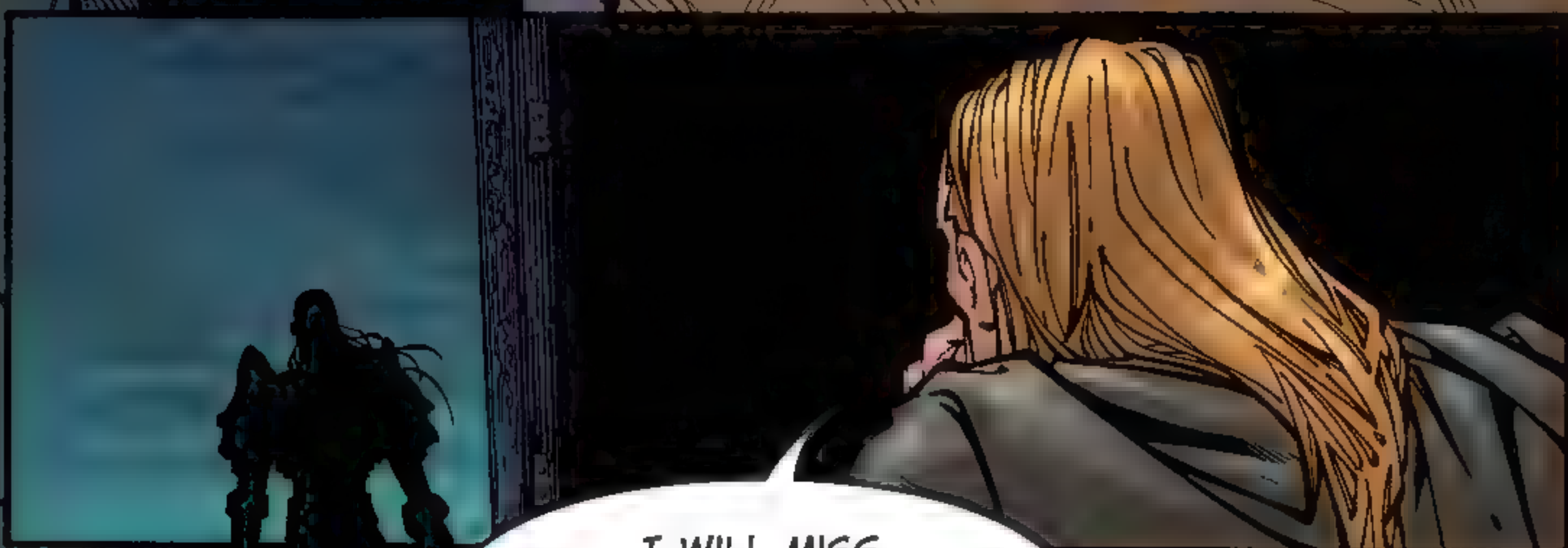


**LIAR, TEMPTER,
CORRUPTER, PRINCE
OF EVIL...** LIKE THAT...
ALL THINGS I'M GOOD
AT, MIND YOU--BUT
PEACE DOESN'T
SEEM LIKELY.



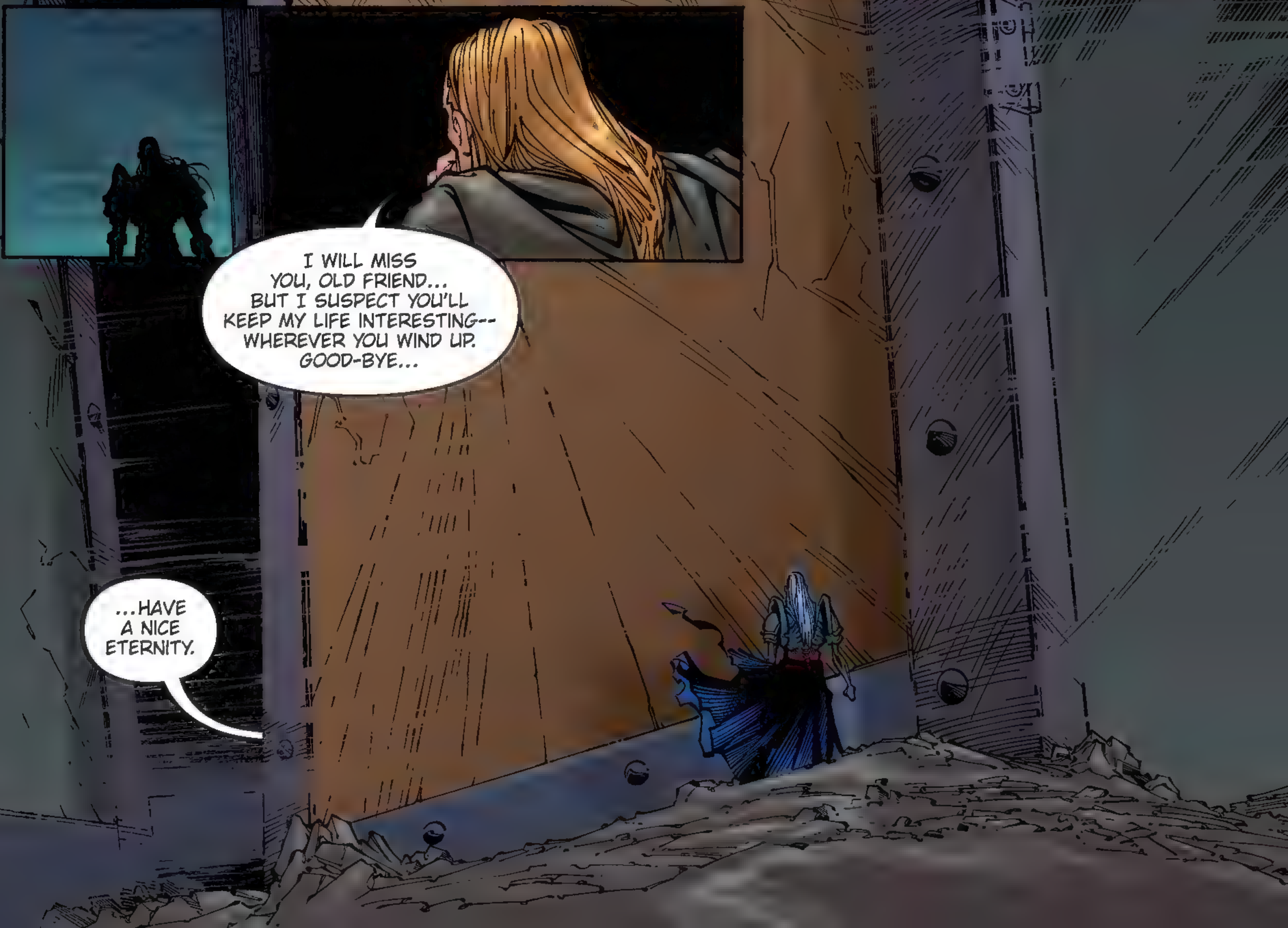
THE **HUMANS** ARE JUST SAVAGES
NOW, BUT THEY **WILL** HATE YOU FOR
YOUR **OTHERNESS** FOREVER...
EXPECT A LOT OF LONELY
NIGHTS.

SEPARATED
FROM **HEAVEN**, I AM
ALREADY DESPERATELY
ALONE. I'LL HAVE
TO GET USED
TO IT.

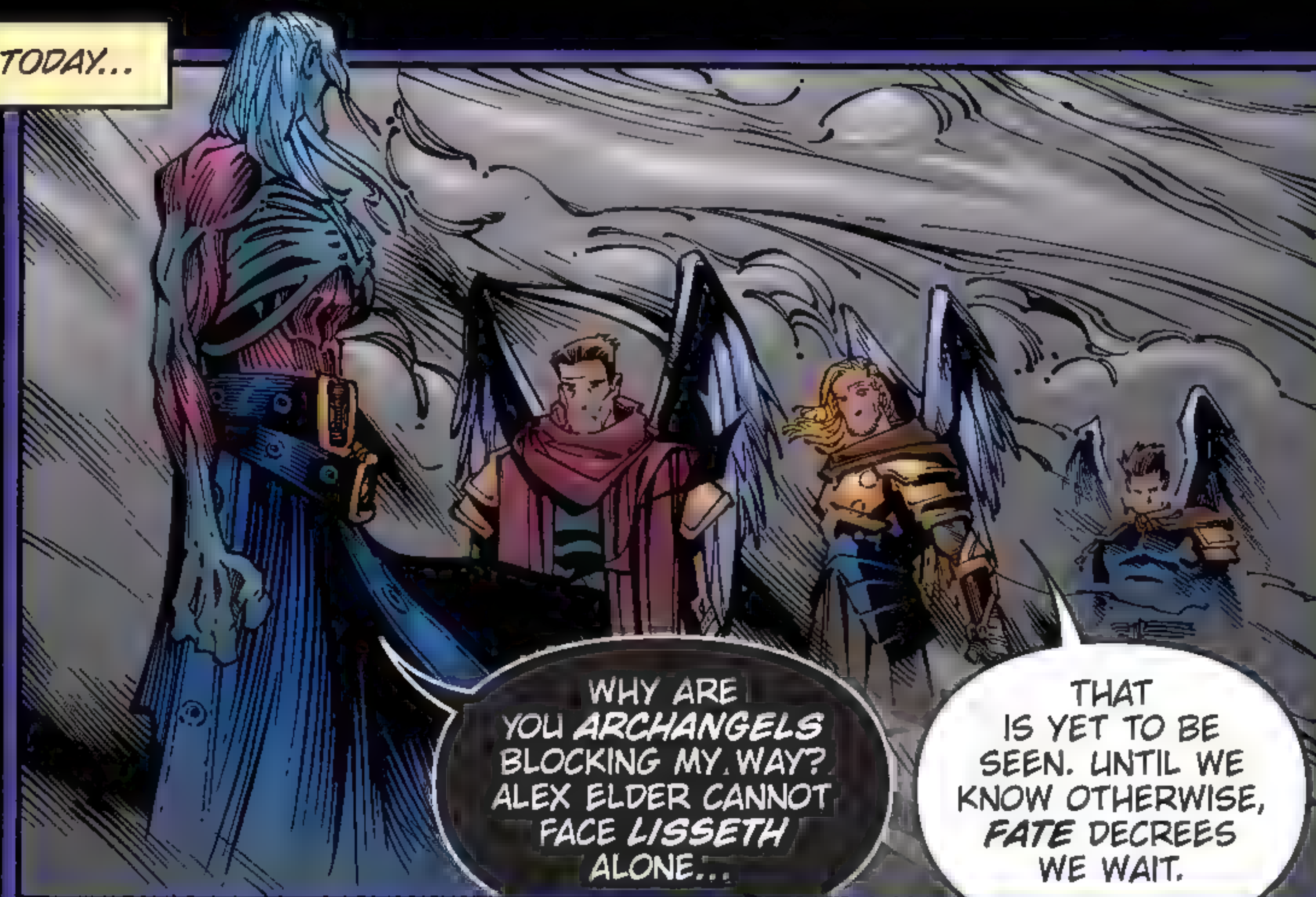


I WILL MISS
YOU, OLD FRIEND...
BUT I SUSPECT YOU'LL
KEEP MY LIFE INTERESTING--
WHEREVER YOU WIND UP.
GOOD-BYE...

...HAVE
A NICE
ETERNITY.



TODAY...



WHY ARE YOU ARCHANGELS BLOCKING MY WAY? ALEX ELDER CANNOT FACE LISSETH ALONE...

THAT IS YET TO BE SEEN. UNTIL WE KNOW OTHERWISE, FATE DECREES WE WAIT.

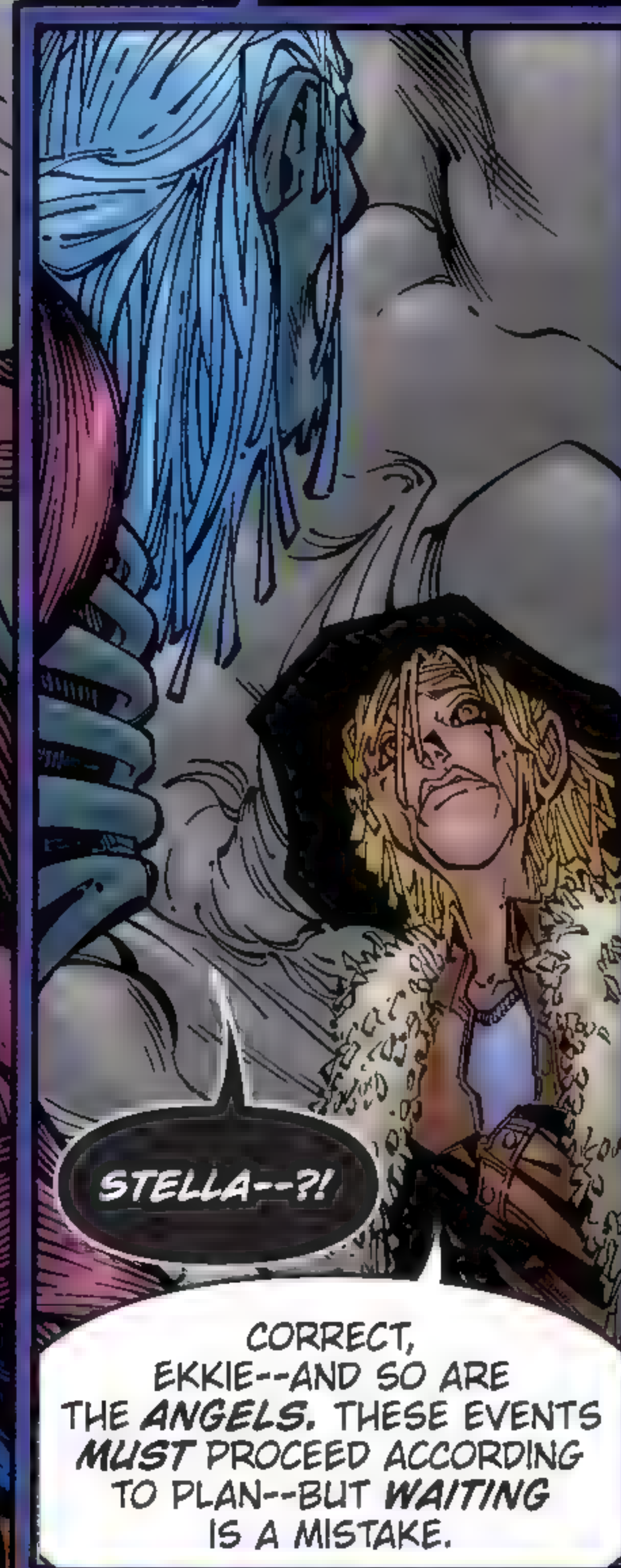


A DIVINE PLAN IS UNSPOOLING... THE BOY **MUST** BE ALLOWED TO PLAY HIS PART.



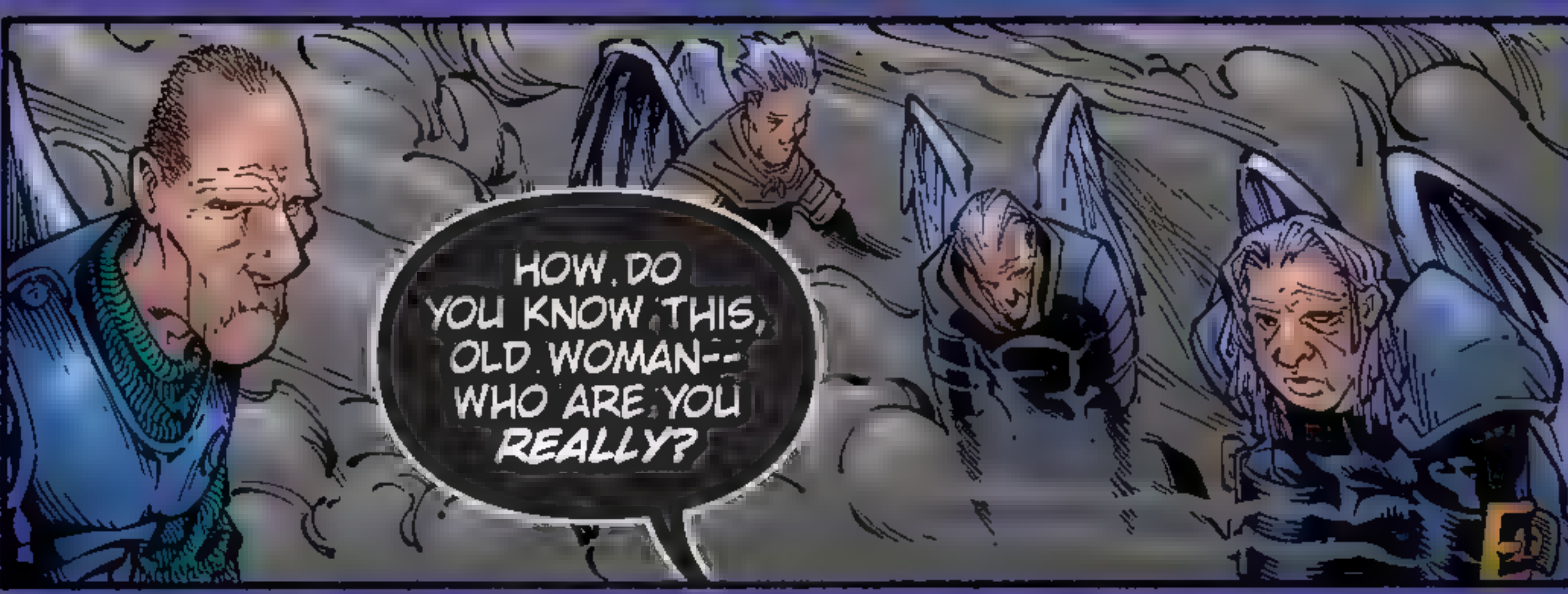
MICHAEL... I DEMAND-- WAIT, WHY DO YOU ALL LOOK SO... AGED?!

CUT OFF FROM OUR **REALM**, WE ARE CUT OFF FROM THE SOURCE OF OUR **EXISTENCE**... UNLESS LISSETH'S SPELL OF SEPARATION CAN BE ENDED WE WILL DIE HERE. STILL WE WILL NOT **INTERVENE**.

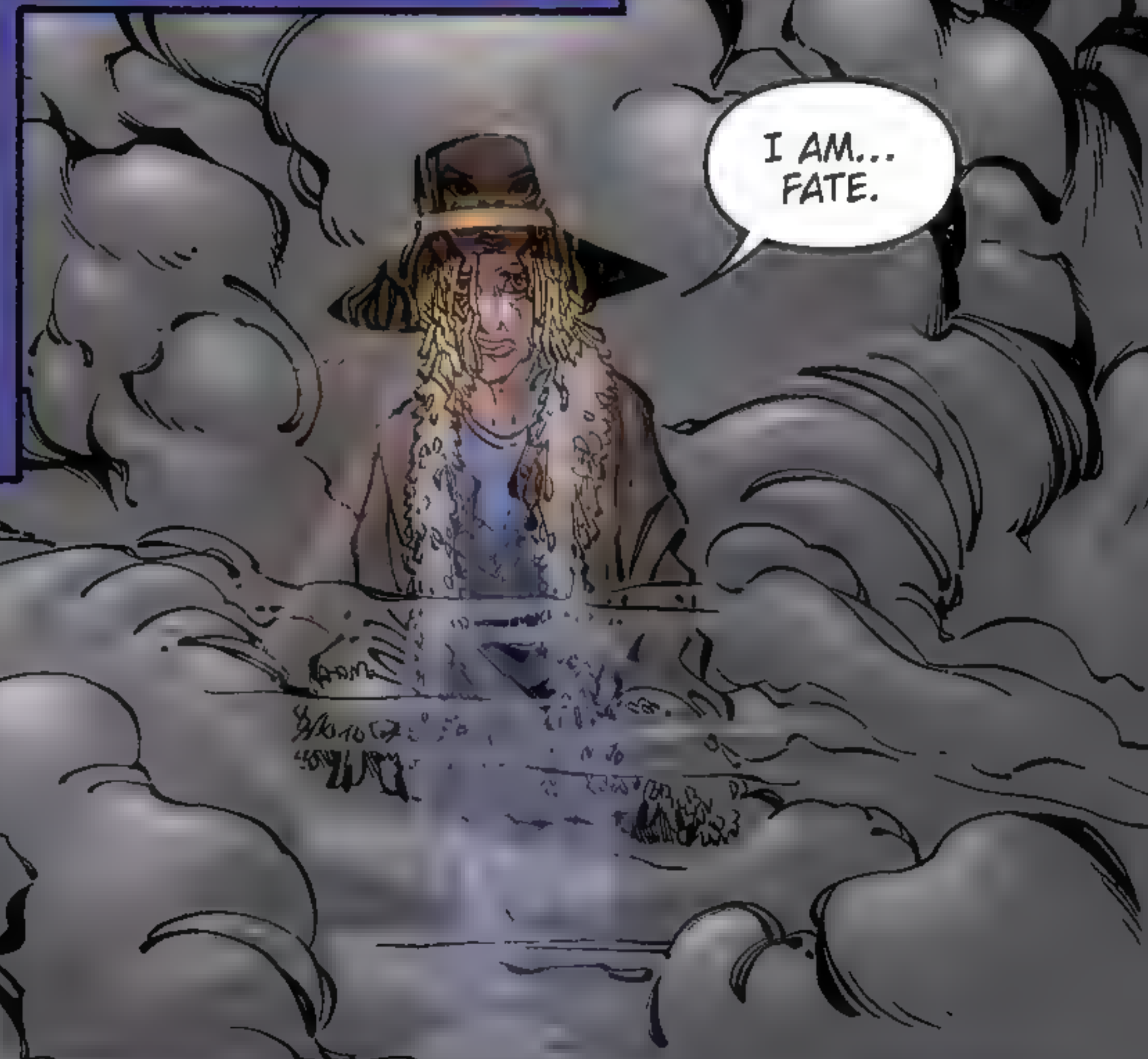


STELLA--?!

CORRECT, EKKIE--AND SO ARE THE **ANGELS**. THESE EVENTS **MUST** PROCEED ACCORDING TO PLAN--BUT **WAITING** IS A MISTAKE.



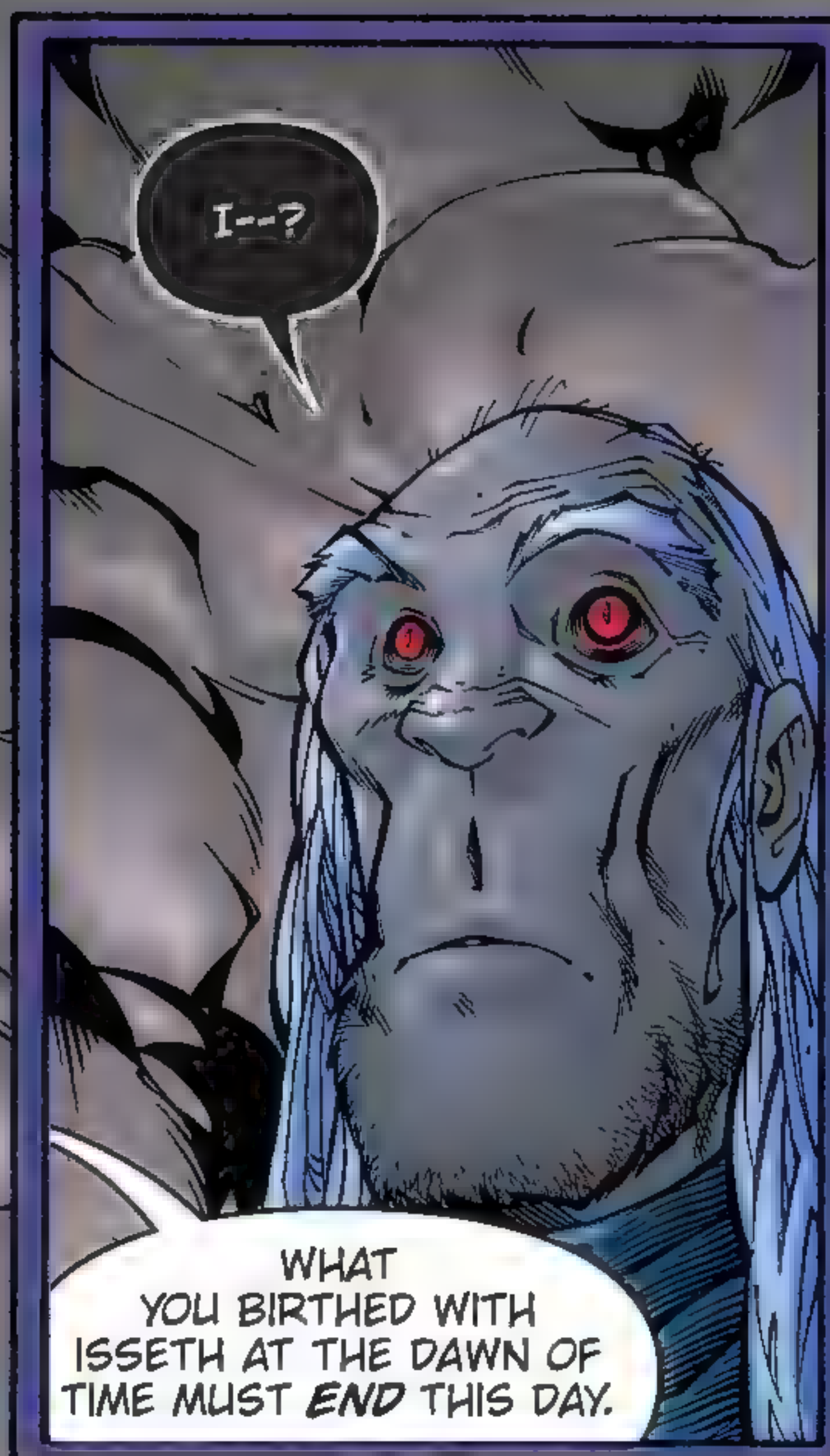
HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS OLD WOMAN-- WHO ARE YOU **REALLY**?



I AM... FATE.



AND I KNOW
THAT **YOU** WILL HAVE
A VERY IMPORTANT PART TO
PLAY AS WELL, GRIGORI...
AND YOU HAD BETTER GET
TO IT SOON.



I--?

WHAT
YOU BIRTHED WITH
ISSETH AT THE DAWN OF
TIME MUST **END** THIS DAY.

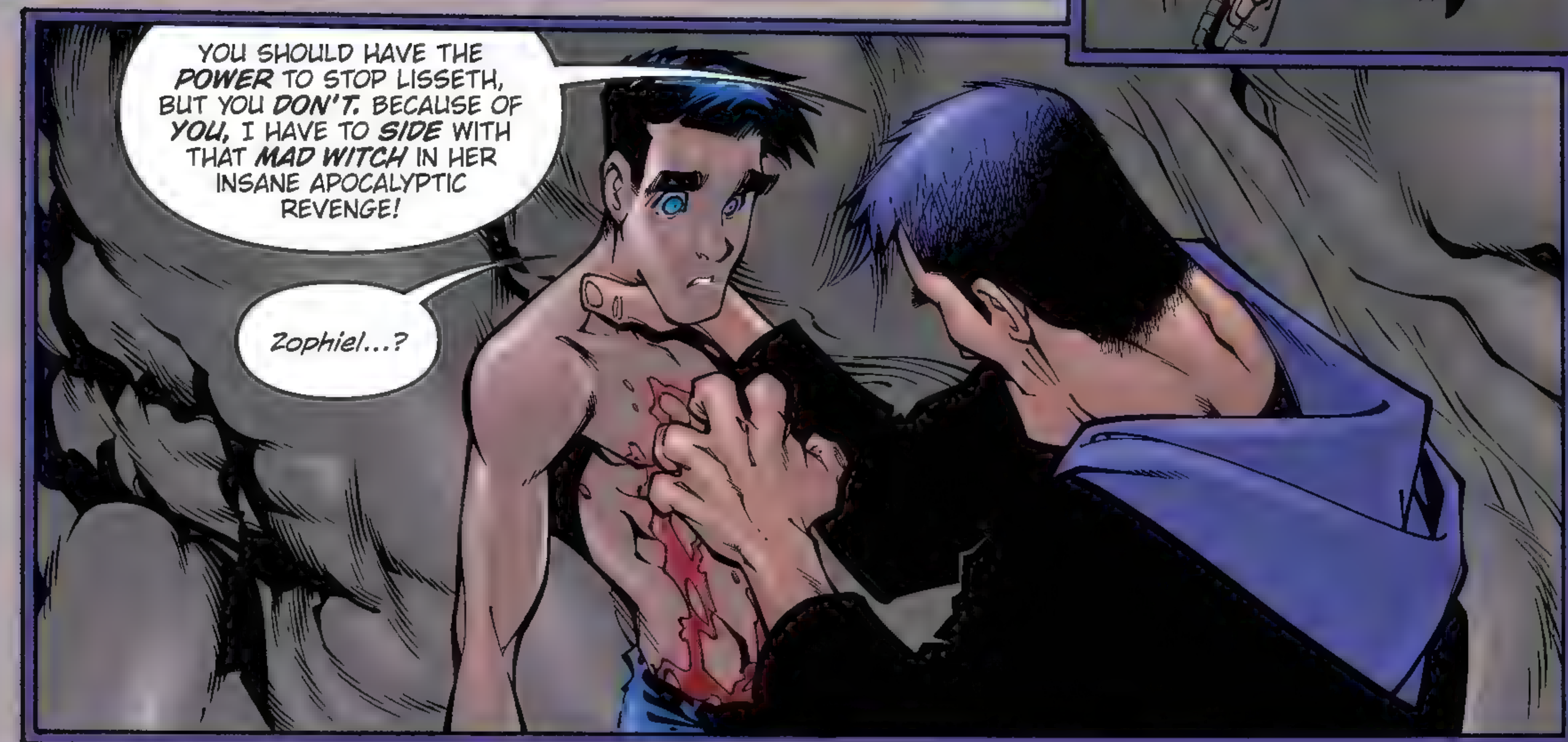


IT MUST **ALL**
COME FULL
CIRCLE.

PASS,
GRIGORI--
GO WITH
GOD...



YOU'RE WORTHLESS,
BOY. IF GOD INDEED CHOOSE
YOU TO SAVE THE WORLD, IT
WAS A LAME CHOICE. ONE
THAT WILL SHORTLY **DOOM**
EXISTENCE AS WE
KNOW IT.



YOU SHOULD HAVE THE
POWER TO STOP LISSETH,
BUT YOU **DON'T**. BECAUSE OF
YOU, I HAVE TO **SIDE** WITH
THAT **MAD WITCH** IN HER
INSANE APOCALYPTIC
REVENGE!

Zophiel...?

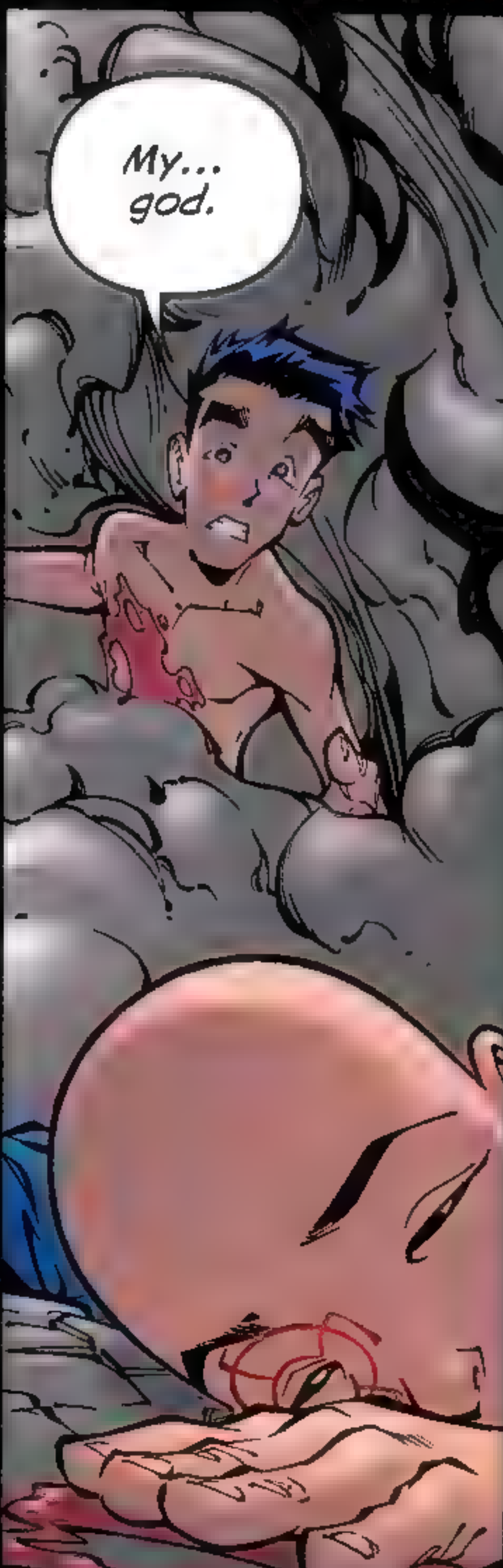


GET AWAY FROM ME, VAN FLEET! YOU SERVE LISSETH TO SAVE YOUR OWN ASS-- THAT'S NOT ON ME!

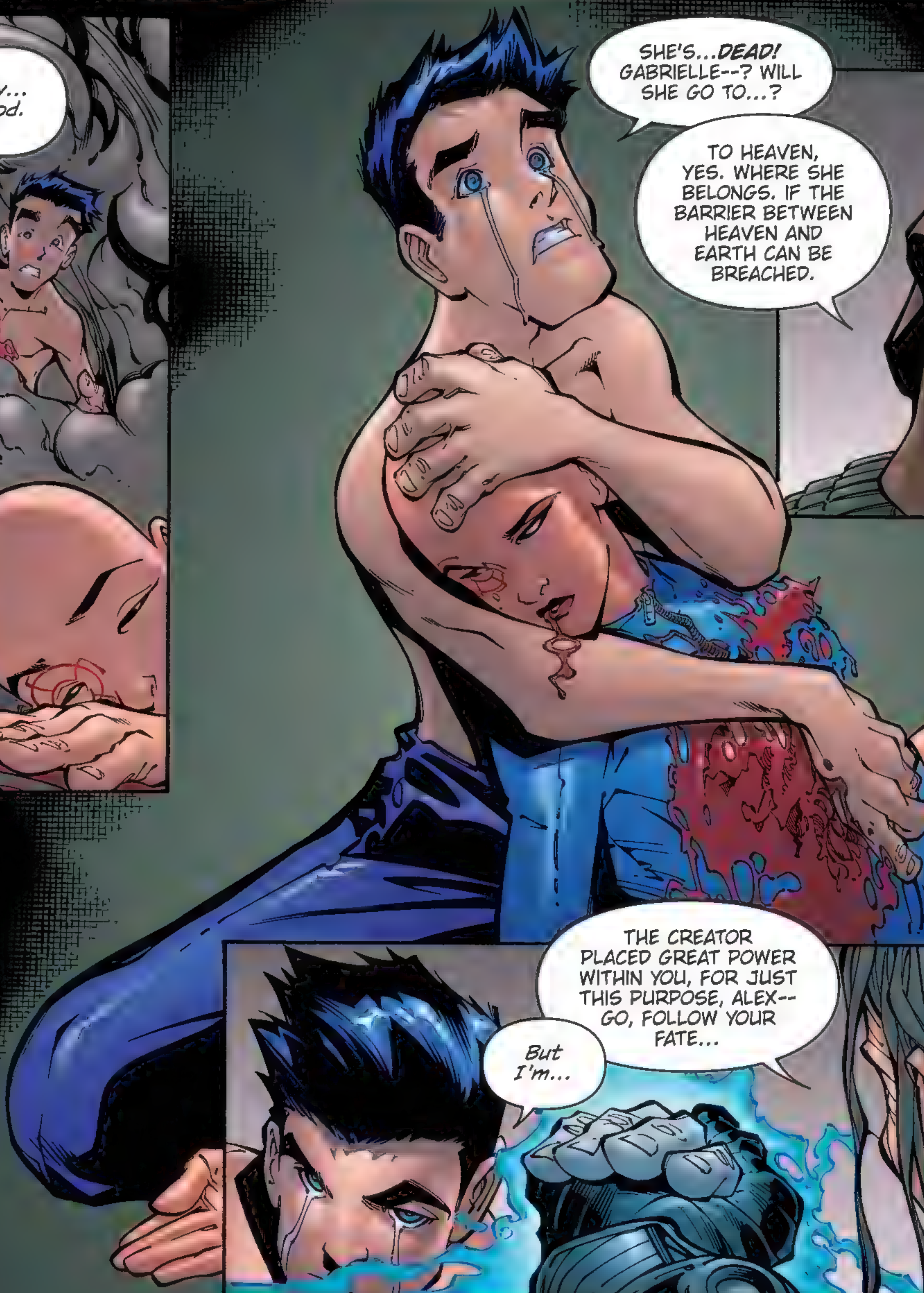
ZWAAGH
YAAA--!



WHERE IS ZOPHIE--DID SHE REALLY SACRIFICE HERSELF TO SAVE ME?!



My... god.



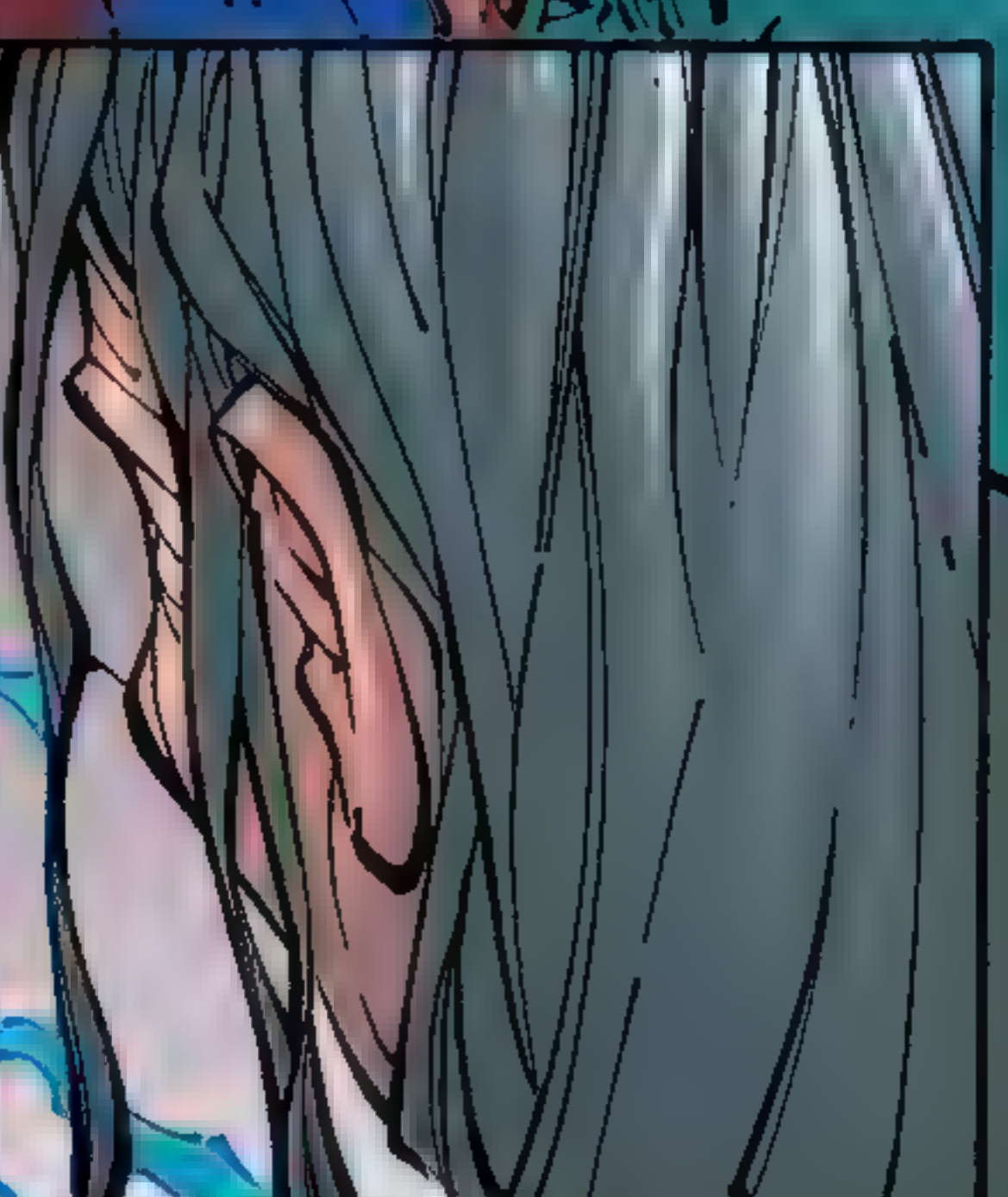
SHE'S...DEAD! GABRIELLE--? WILL SHE GO TO...?

TO HEAVEN, YES. WHERE SHE BELONGS. IF THE BARRIER BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH CAN BE BREACHED.



But I'm...

THE CREATOR PLACED GREAT POWER WITHIN YOU, FOR JUST THIS PURPOSE, ALEX-- GO, FOLLOW YOUR FATE...





--HEALED?
AND STRONGER
THAN I'VE
EVER FELT?!
HOW--?



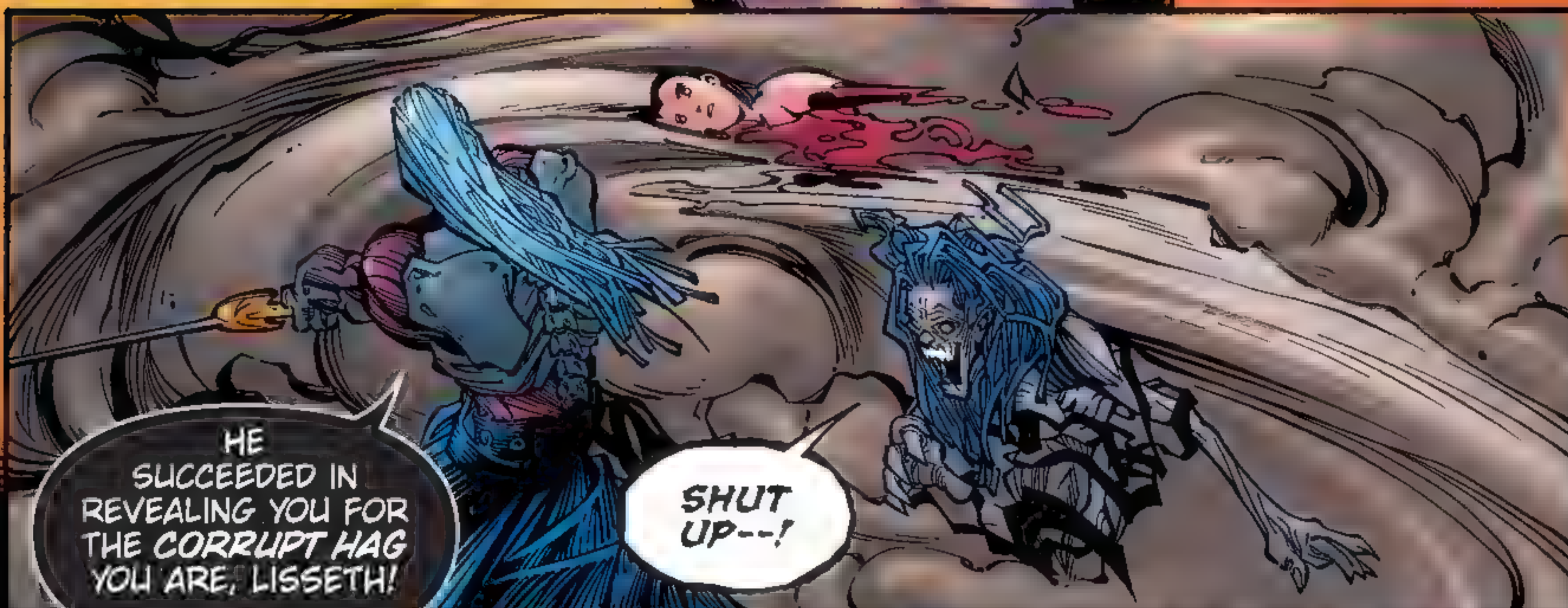
WE HAVE GIVEN
YOU OUR *VITALITY* AND
STRENGTH, ALEX. YOU
WILL NEED IT TO FACE
LISSETH...

THANKS...
I'LL MAKE HER PAY
FOR EVERYTHING...!



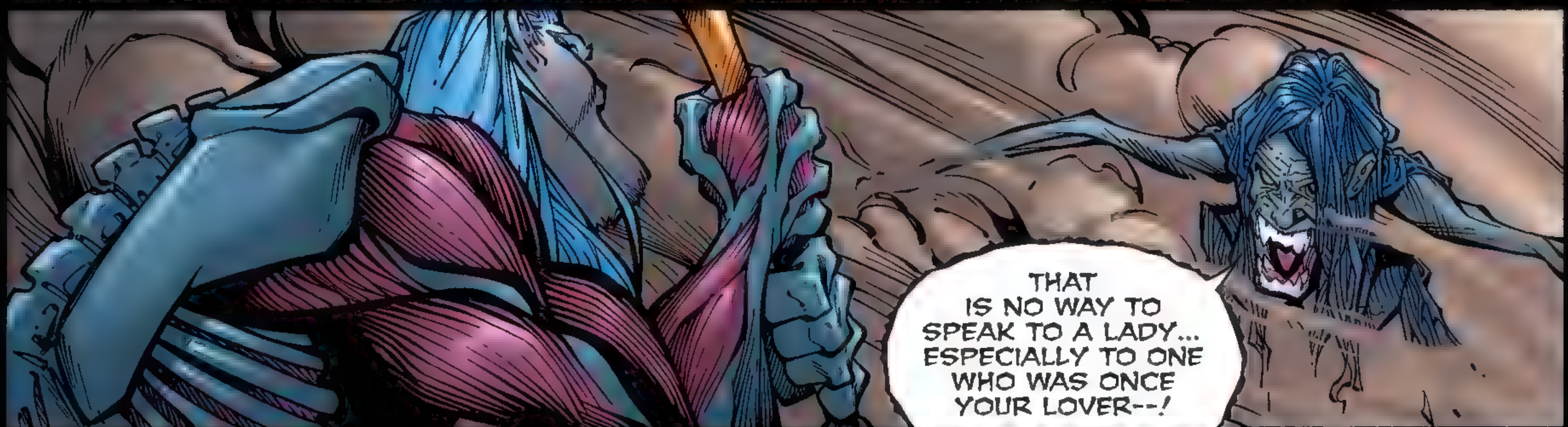
YOUR ATTACK IS
POINTLESS, EKIMUS.
I WON'T BE
STOPPED...

THE BOY WAS
MORE POWERFUL
THAN I ANTICIPATED,
BUT EVEN HE
FAILED.

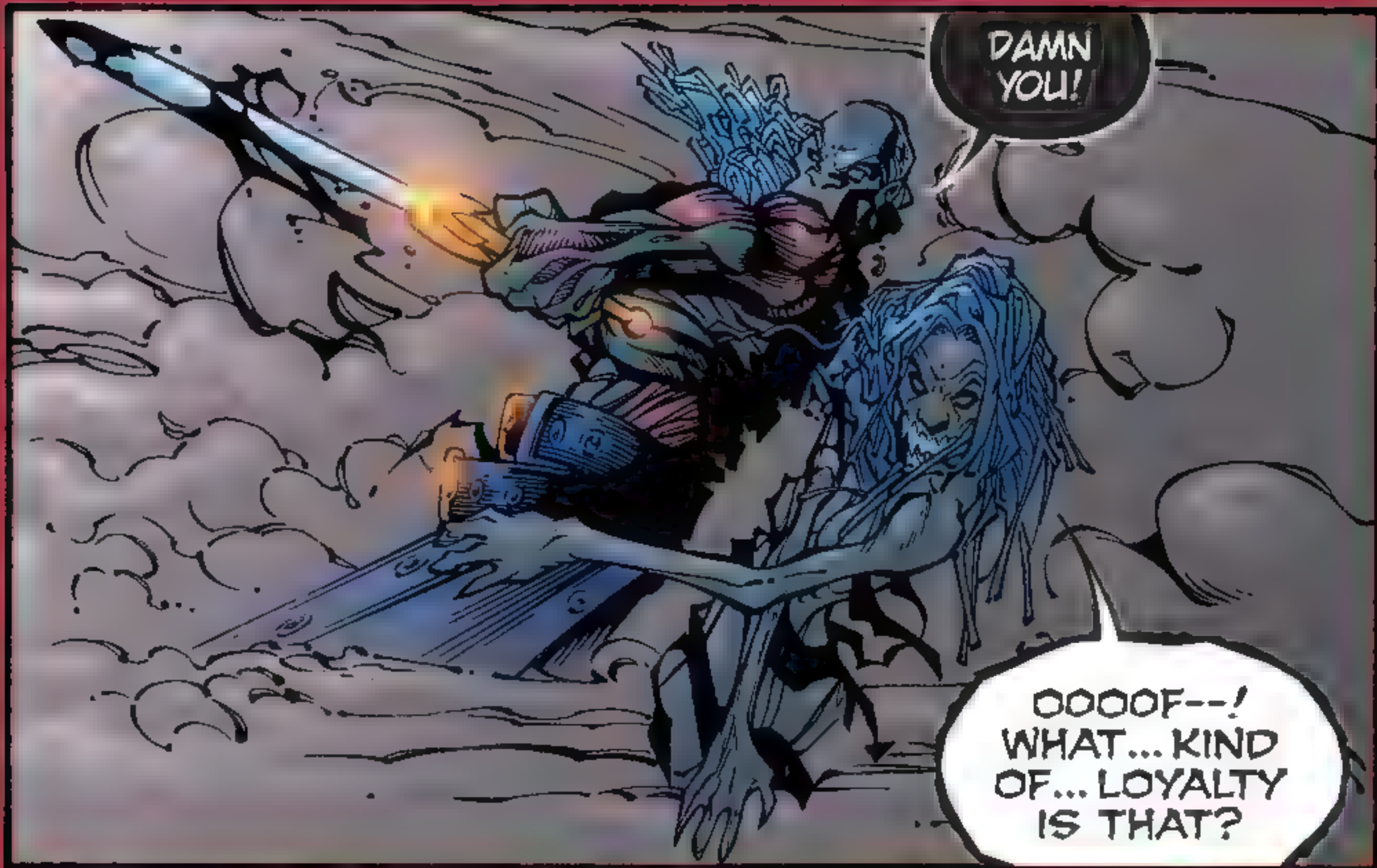


HE
SUCCEEDED IN
REVEALING YOU FOR
THE *CORRUPT* HAG
YOU ARE, LISSETH!

SHUT
UP--!



THAT
IS NO WAY TO
SPEAK TO A LADY...
ESPECIALLY TO ONE
WHO WAS ONCE
YOUR LOVER--!



DAMN YOU!

OOOOF---!
WHAT... KIND
OF... LOYALTY
IS THAT?



BELIEVE ME, EKIMUS,
I NEVER WANTED IT TO
COME TO THIS... BUT
YOU LEAVE ME NO
CHOICE...



WAAH
GHH



YAAAAH---!

SQUEEE

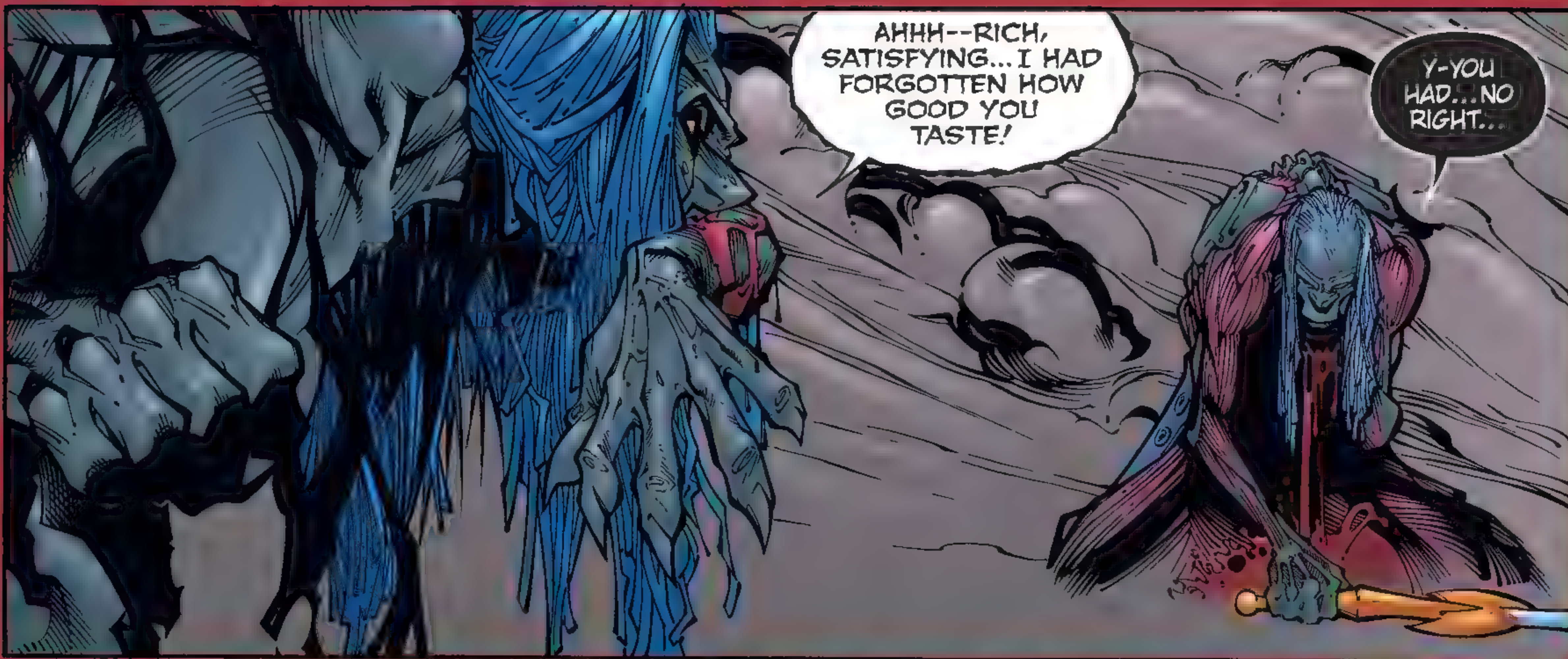


THEIR
TEETH ARE
SHARP, EH,
EKIMUS... ? MINE
ARE SHARPER
STILL.



AIEEE!

CHOMP

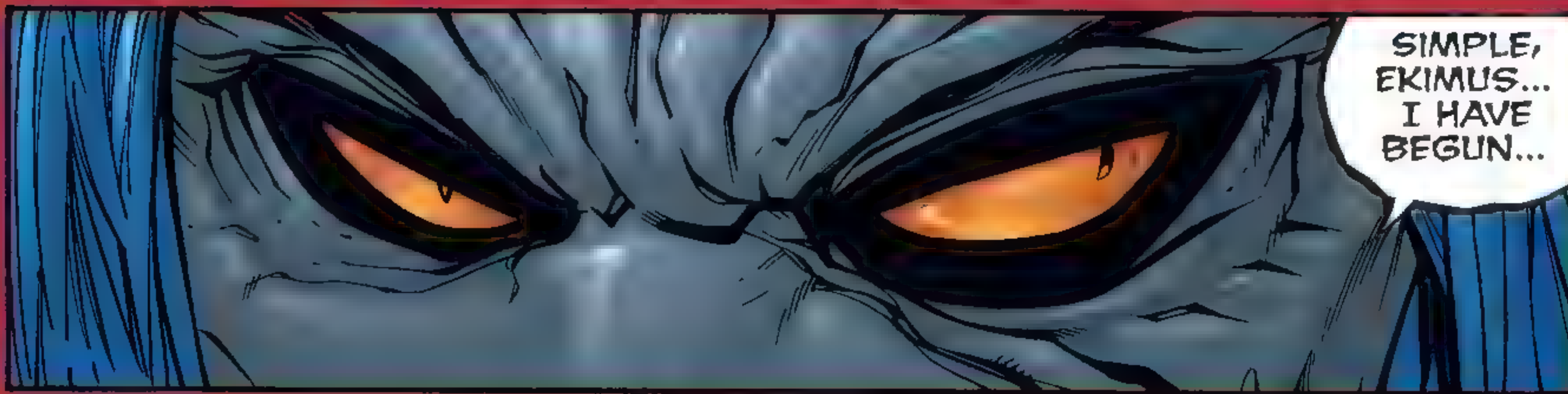


AHHH--RICH,
SATISFYING... I HAD
FORGOTTEN HOW
GOOD YOU
TASTE!

Y-YOU
HAD... NO
RIGHT...



I-I-WHAT
HAVE YOU...
DONE... TO
ME...?!

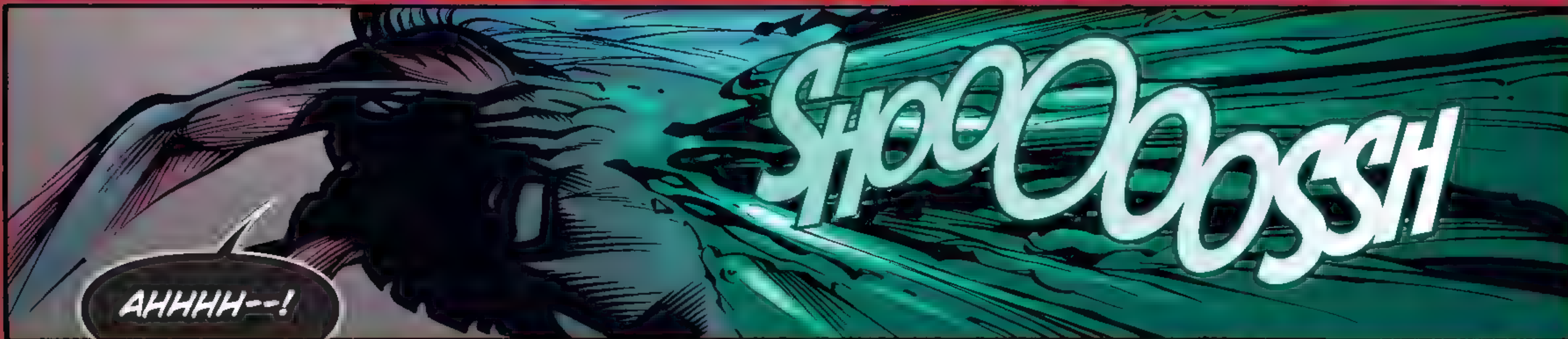


SIMPLE,
EKIMUS...
I HAVE
BEGUN...



...TO
KILL
YOU!

WHUUUUUU



AHHHH--!

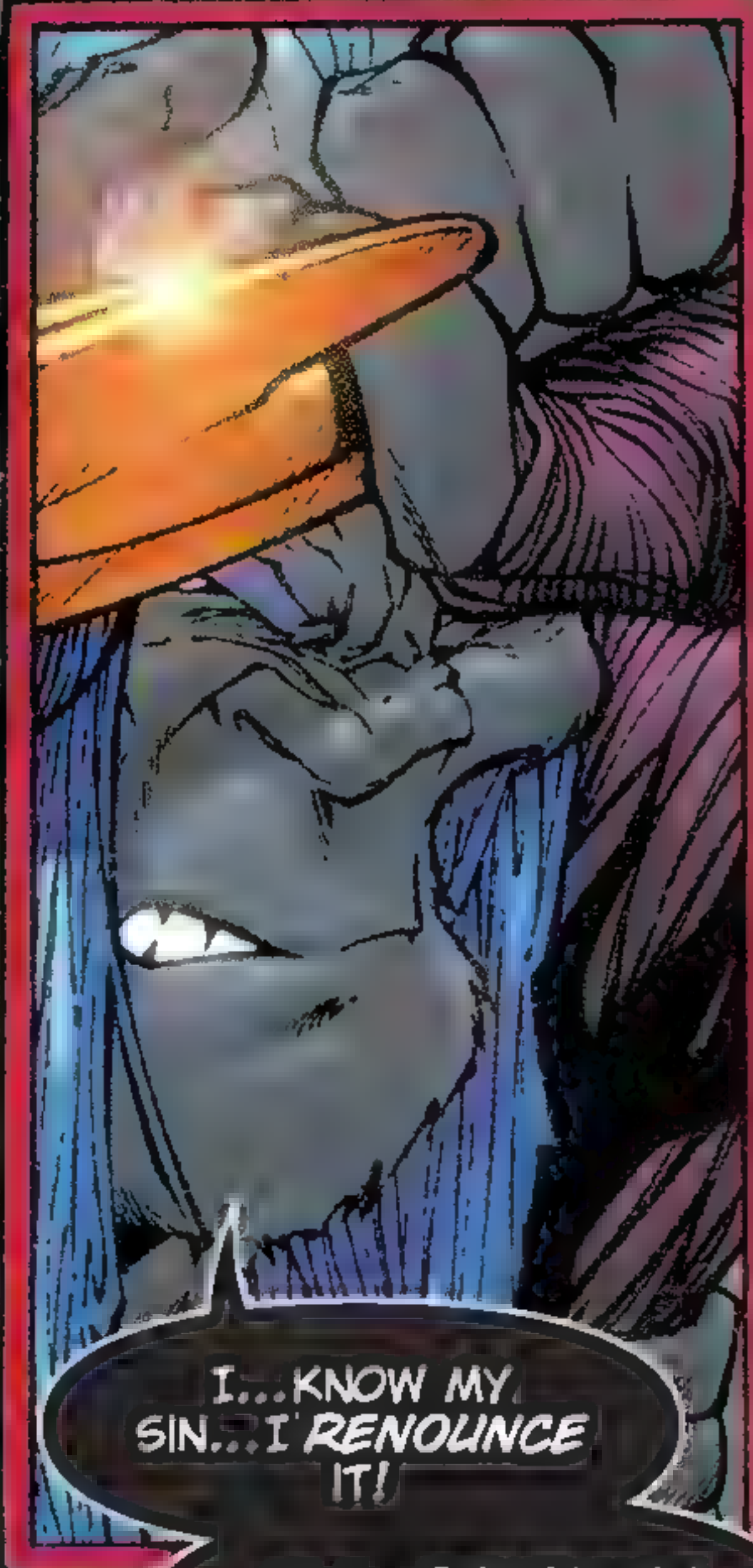


YOU... WILL...
PAY... FOR ALL
YOUR EVIL,
WITH...



I HAVE PAID--
FOR A LONELY
ETERNITY,
FOOL!

BESIDES,
REMEMBER THAT
IT WAS THROUGH
YOUR SEED THAT
I BIRTHED THIS
EVIL!



I...KNOW MY SIN...I RENOUNCE IT!

AS I...RENOUNCE YOU... I WILL NOT FALL UNDER YOUR ...SPELL AGAIN!

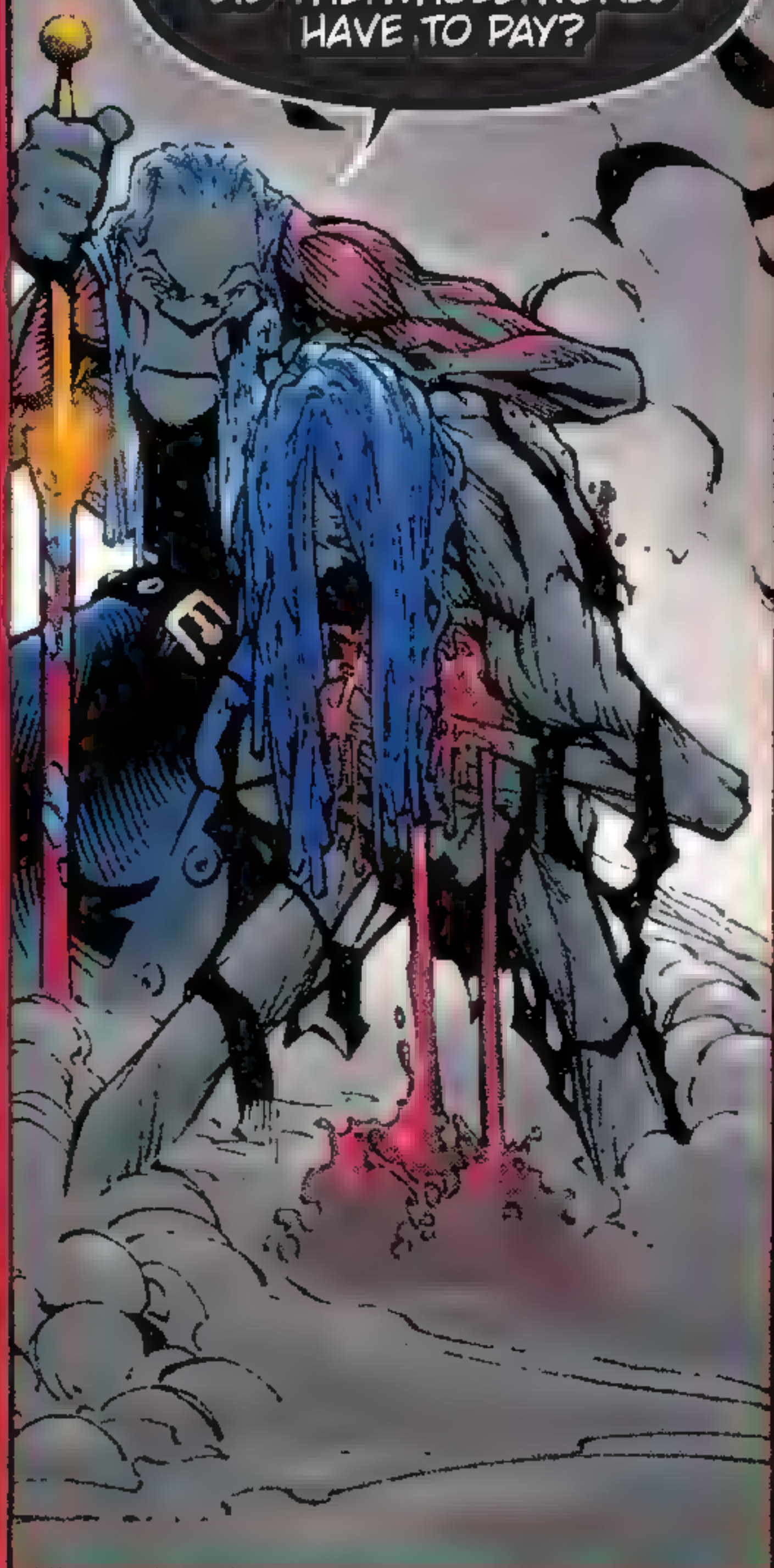
DIE, BITCH!

AAAAARRRGH!

SKRUNNCH

DESPITE YOUR VAST EVIL, I DO REMEMBER OUR TIME TOGETHER, LISSETH-- WHY DID IT HAVE TO COME TO THIS?!

WHY COULD WE NOT HAVE SALVED EACH OTHER'S PAIN? WHY DID THE WHOLE WORLD HAVE TO PAY?

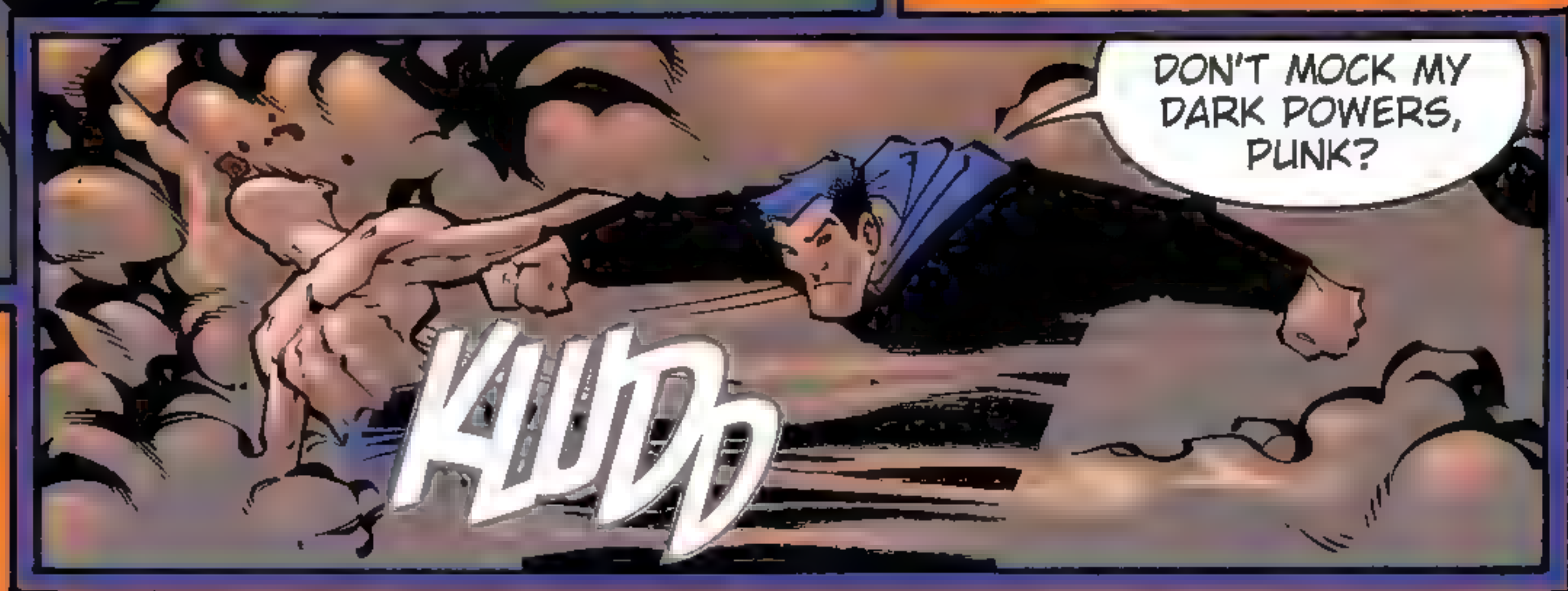
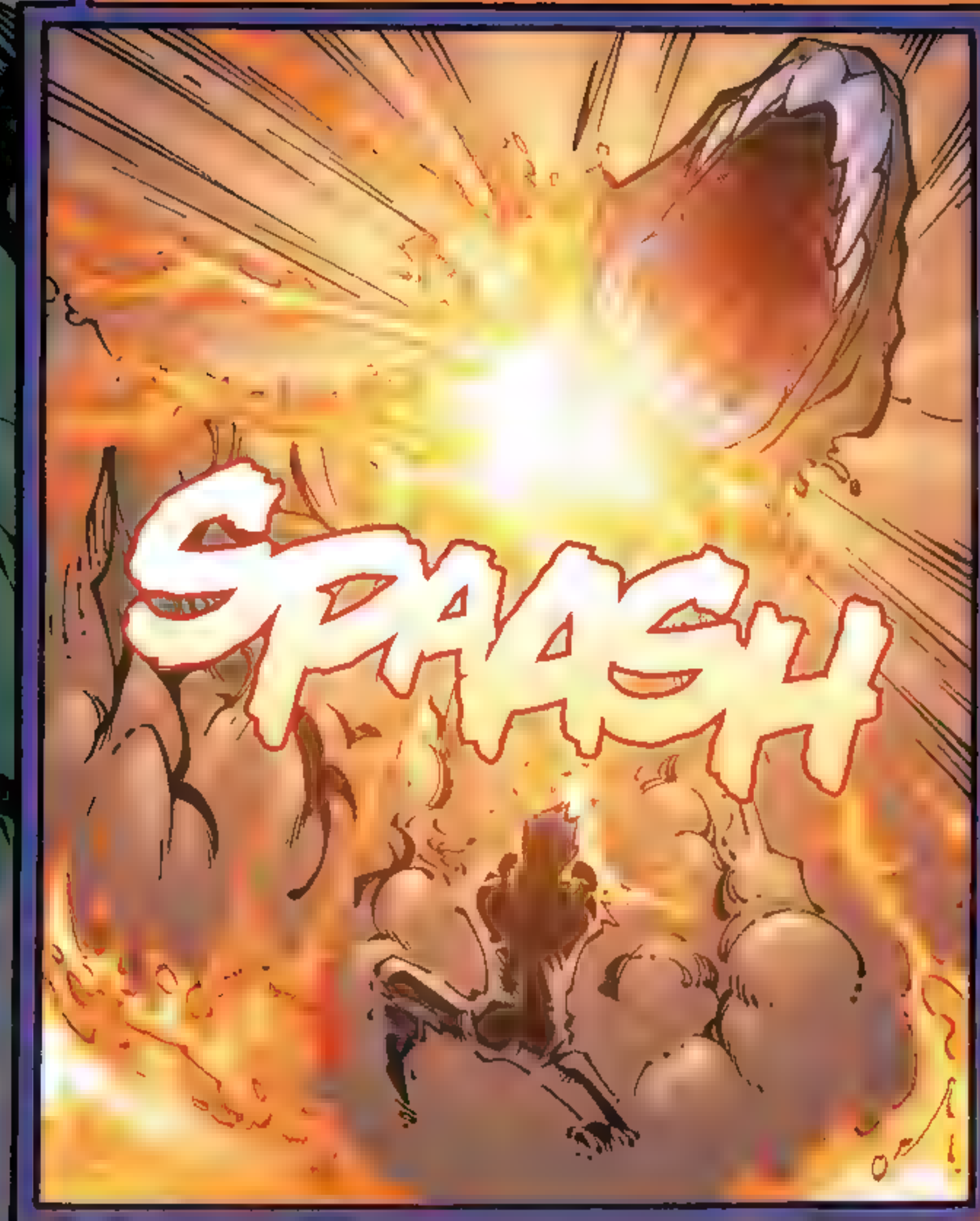
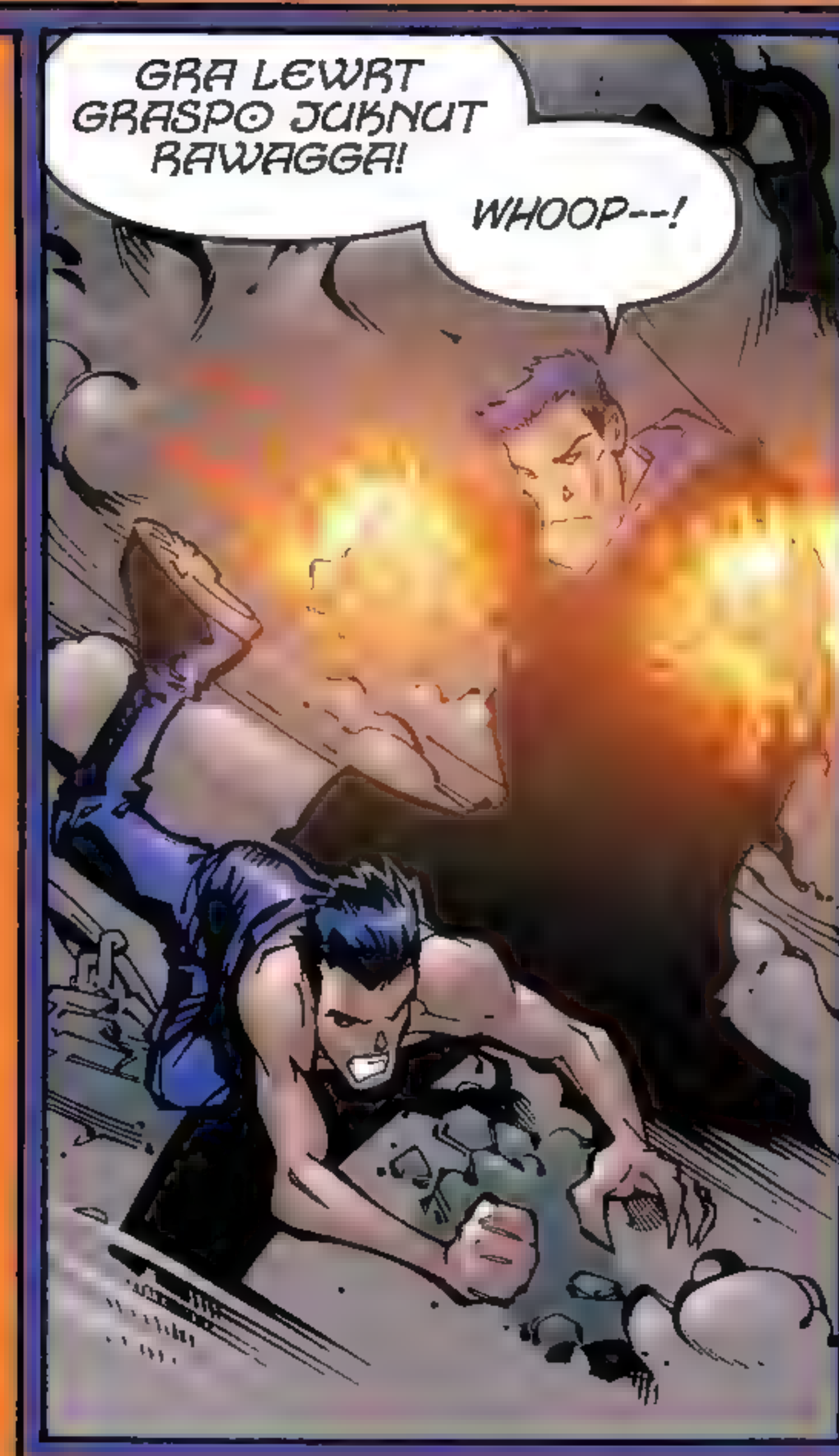


WHAT IS THE LOVE OF ONE FELLOW WERETCH WHEN AN ENTIRE WORLD DESPISE YOU?

I WAS TO BE THE MOTHER OF ALL YET I WAS REJECTED! THE WORLD WILL PAY FOR THAT...



MMMMPH





"...AS YOU DID AT THE DAWN
WHEN YOU ALLIED WITH THE
LUCIFER AGAINST THE
LEGIONS OF HEAVEN.

"OR, MORE HILARIOUSLY,
WHEN YOU TRIED TO
REPENT AND REJOIN
PARADISE.

YOU'RE AN
ETERNAL FOOL,
EKIMUS... ALWAYS
UNDERESTIMATING
ME.

ALWAYS
CHOOSING
THE WRONG
SIDE...



"HOW IT MUST HAVE
STUNG, AS YOU
CRAWLED OFF INTO
THAT PRIMORDIAL
MUD-HEAP TO FIND
A PLACE TO FIT
IN...



"BUT YOU LEARNED THE HARD
WAY THAT PARADISE AND THE
TREE OF LIFE WERE **SEALED**
AGAINST YOU FOREVER!



"...BUT ALL YOU FOUND WERE
THE MONKEY-PEOPLE... ISN'T
THAT RIGHT... ?

"BUT ANY HOPE OF **COMFORT**
DIED WHENEVER THEY BEHELD
YOUR DEMONIC FORM...

"...THEY COULD ONLY OFFER
FEAR AND HATRED WHERE
YOU CRAVED WELCOME."

"YOU WERE A *PARIAH* EVERYWHERE AND IN EVERY TIME.

"YOU WERE DEPRIVED OF FELLOWSHIP AND REST... HELL, YOU WERE EVEN DENIED THE WARMTH OF THE SUN!"

"YOUR GOD CAN REALLY CARRY A *GRUDGE*, CAN'T HE?"

"WE WERE SO MUCH ALIKE... SO ALONE... SO *OUTCAST*..."

"...IT WAS ONLY LOGICAL THAT WE WOULD DRIFT TOGETHER.

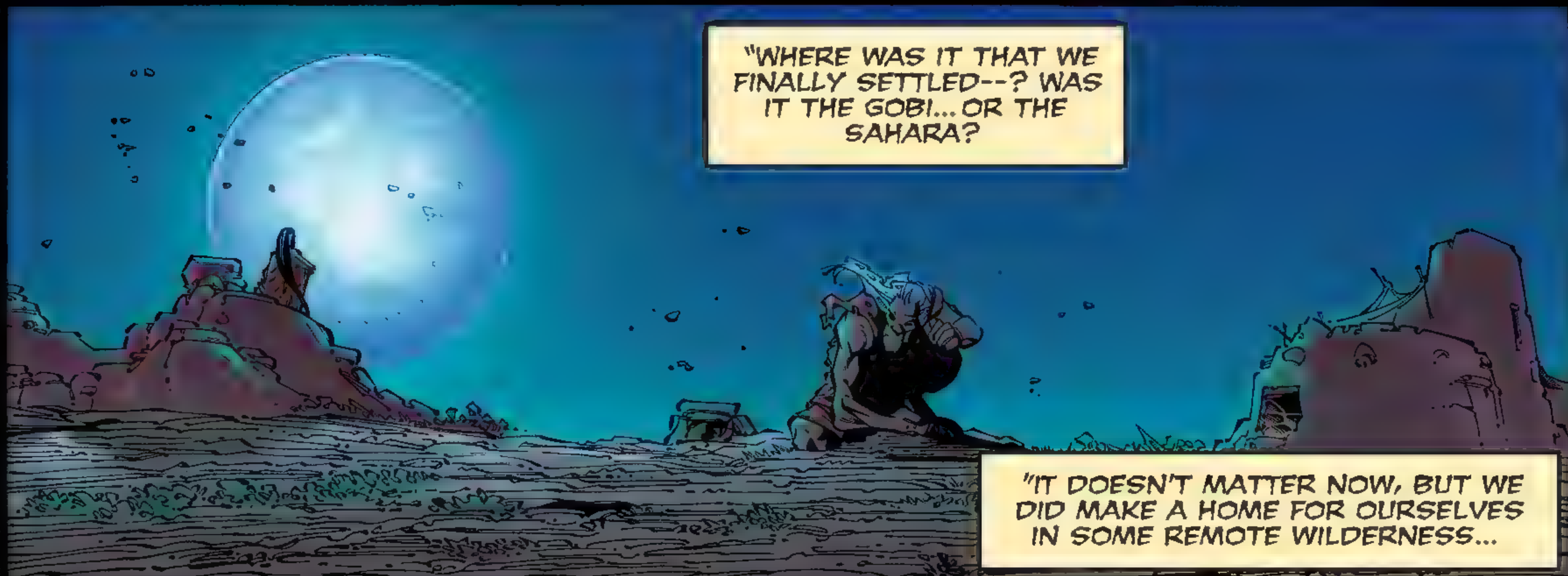
"OUR COUPLING WAS DESPERATE, CLUMSY AND FOUL... BUT SWEETER BY FAR THAN ANYTHING IN MY HAUNTED EXISTENCE THEN OR NOW..."

"ALAS, THE BLASTED HUMANS COULDN'T LEAVE US ALONE..."

"LIKE YOU, I WAS SHUNNED AND HUNTED... UNLIKE YOU, I BROUGHT IT ON MYSELF BY *PREYING* ON THE MONKEY-PEOPLE..."

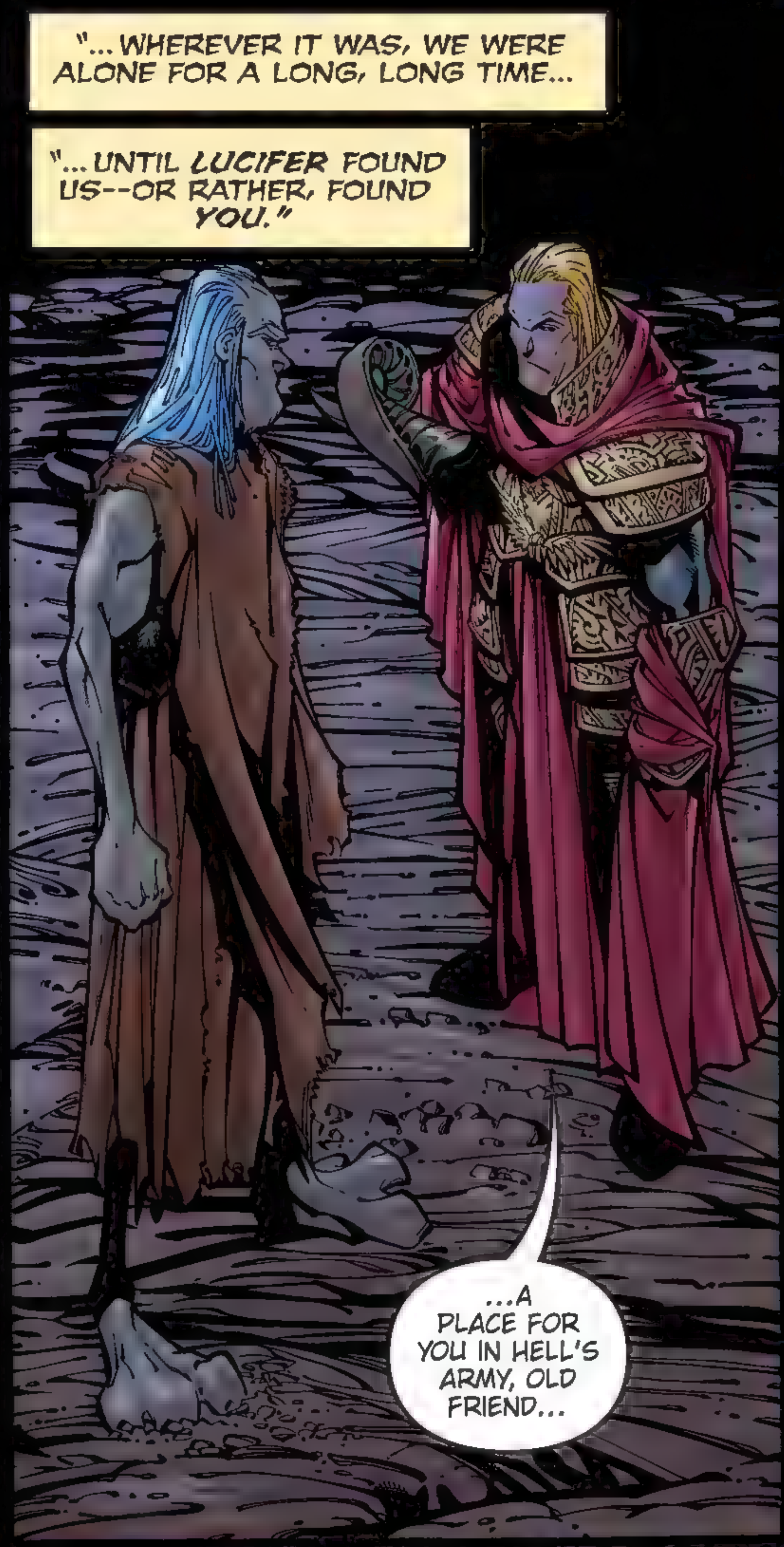
"I'LL NEVER FORGET THE LOOK OF *DISGUST* ON YOUR FACE WHEN YOU REALIZED *WHAT* I WAS..."

"...BUT I'LL GIVE YOU *THIS*, YOU WERE A *GENTLEMAN*. WITHOUT YOU I'D NEVER HAVE ESCAPED!"



"WHERE WAS IT THAT WE FINALLY SETTLED--? WAS IT THE GOBI... OR THE SAHARA?"

"IT DOESN'T MATTER NOW, BUT WE DID MAKE A HOME FOR OURSELVES IN SOME REMOTE WILDERNESS..."



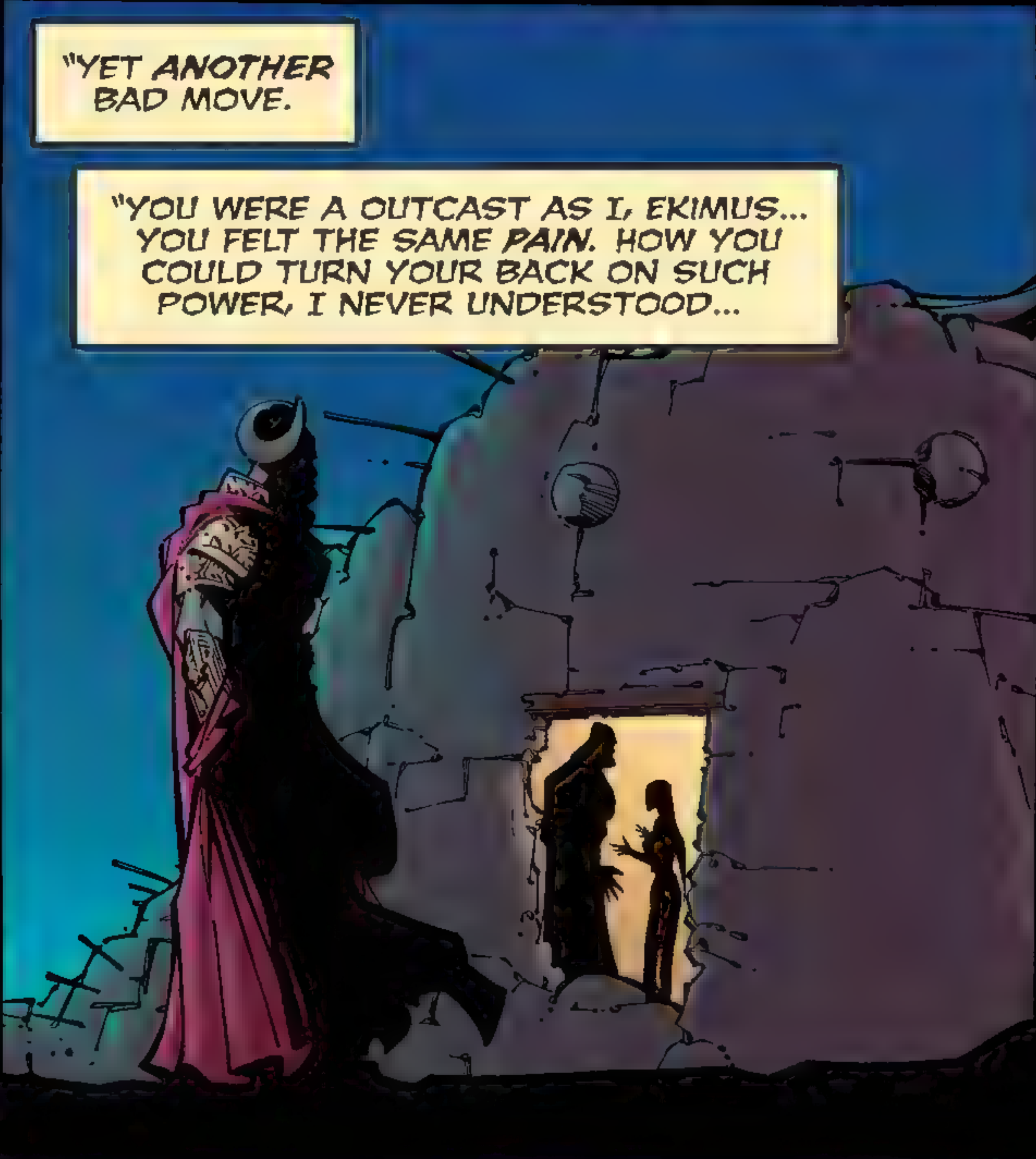
"... WHEREVER IT WAS, WE WERE ALONE FOR A LONG, LONG TIME..."

"... UNTIL LUCIFER FOUND US--OR RATHER, FOUND YOU."

...A PLACE FOR YOU IN HELL'S ARMY, OLD FRIEND...



"HE CAME TO OFFER YOU SUPREMACY INSTEAD OF ETERNAL IGNOMINY... BUT WE KNOW HOW YOU CHOSE, DON'T WE?"



"YET ANOTHER BAD MOVE."

"YOU WERE A OUTCAST AS I, EKIMUS... YOU FELT THE SAME PAIN. HOW YOU COULD TURN YOUR BACK ON SUCH POWER, I NEVER UNDERSTOOD..."



"I IMploRED LUCIFER TO TAKE ME INSTEAD, BUT HE TOO REJECTED ME... THE FOOL!"



I NEED YOU, EKIMUS--
I COMMAND YOUR
OBEDIENCE--! NO ONE
TURNS THEIR BACK
ON THE LORD OF
HELL!

"IT WAS OUR ONE CHANCE OUT
OF THAT HATEFUL ISOLATION
AND YOU BLEW IT!"

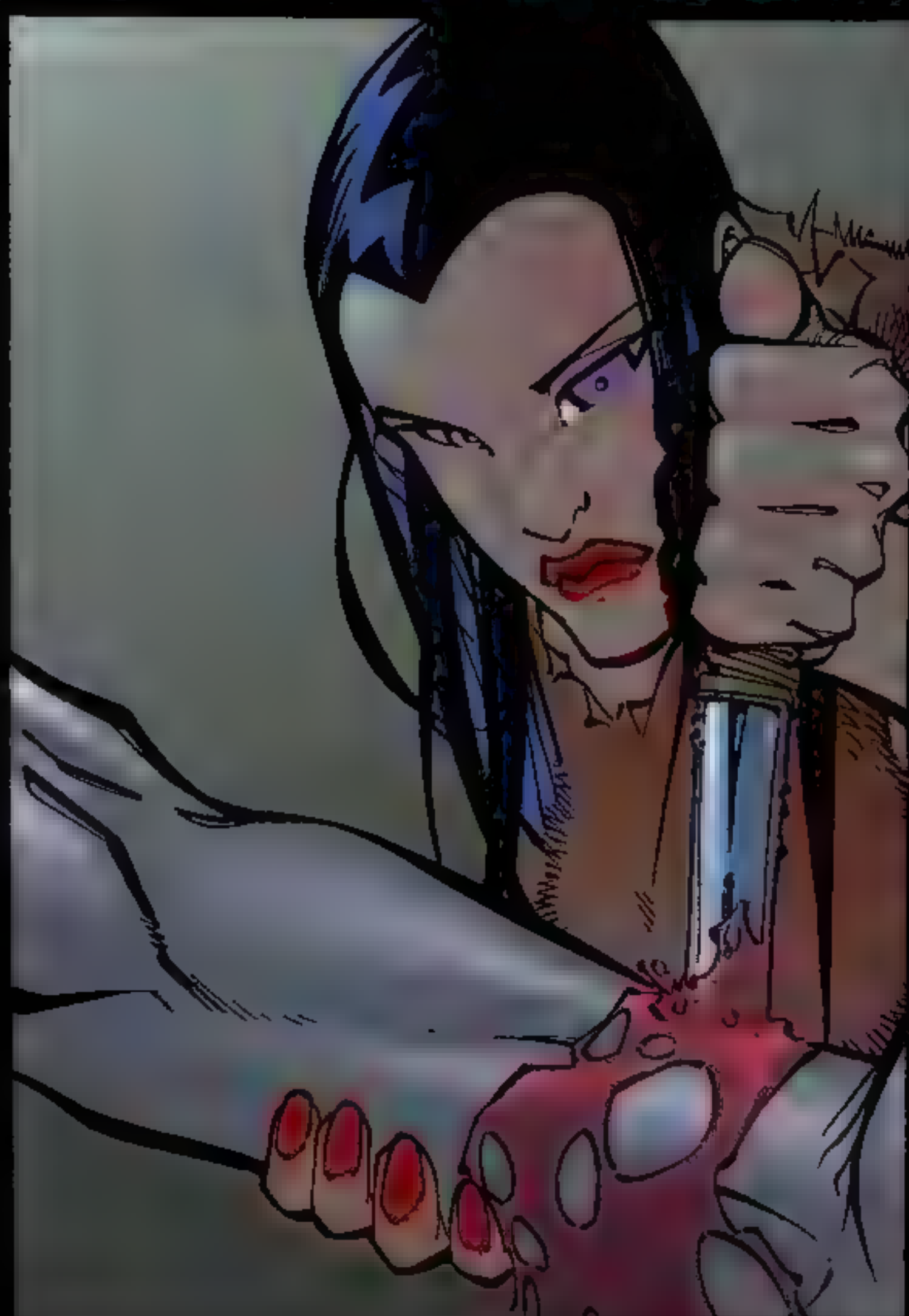
"YOU WERE SO HIGH AND MIGHTY, BUT
WHAT OF ME? WHY DID YOU NEVER
STOP TO CONSIDER MY NEEDS?!"



"I REALIZED THAT IF I WANTED ANYTHING
I WOULD HAVE TO TAKE IT..."

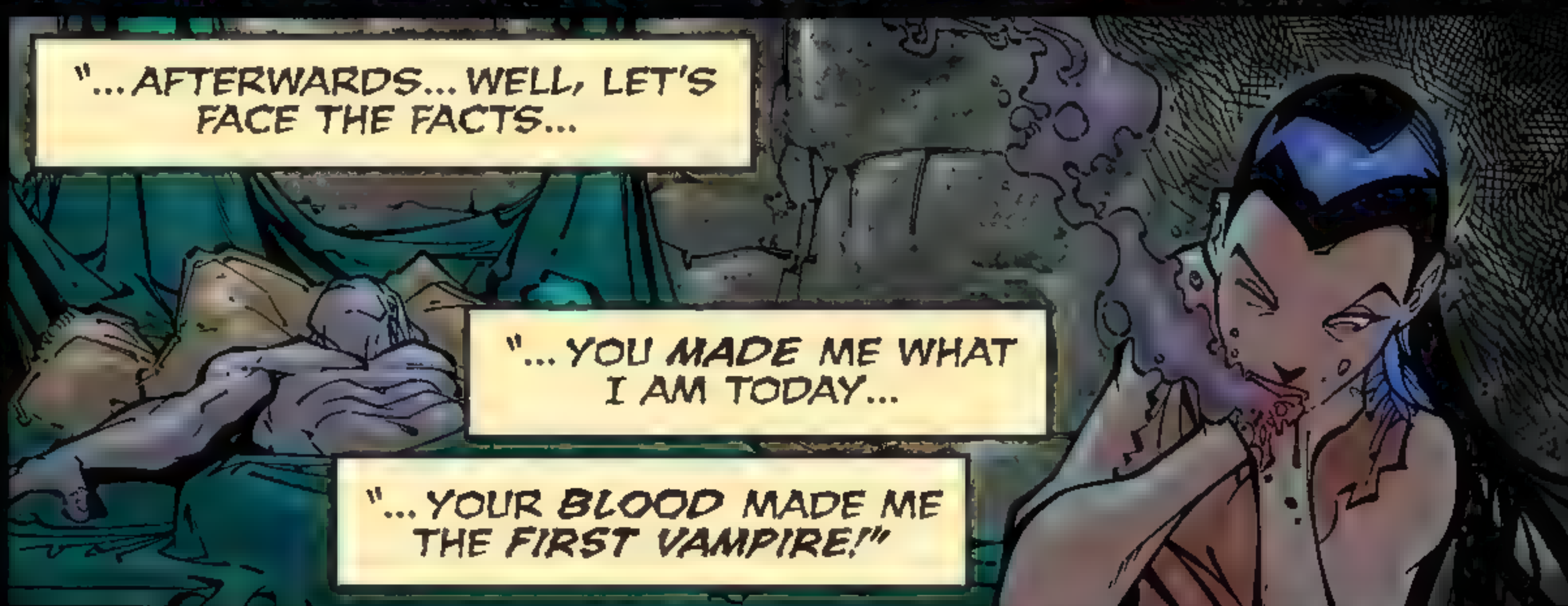
"YOUR IMMORTALITY,
FOR INSTANCE."

"BEFORE I TASTED YOUR BLOOD,
I WAS MERELY MORTAL THOUGH
EXTRAORDINARILY LONG LIVED..."



ARRRRGGH--!

"...AFTERWARDS... WELL, LET'S
FACE THE FACTS..."



"... YOU MADE ME WHAT
I AM TODAY..."

"... YOUR BLOOD MADE ME
THE FIRST VAMPIRE!"

"GRANTED, YOUR BLOOD KILLED ME FIRST... BUT EVEN IN DEATH THE CHANGE WAS AT WORK WITHIN ME.

"YOU WERE A CARRIER OF THE EARTH'S FIRST PLAGUE, AND NEVER SUSPECTED IT..."



"...THOUGH IT WAS UP TO ME TO SPREAD THE CONTAGION.



"WERE YOU SURPRISED WHEN I WAS BORN ANEW?"



"I KNOW YOU WERE HORRIFIED TO REALIZE WHAT YOU HELPED ME CREATE..."

"THOUGH IT WAS SEVERAL THOUSAND YEARS BEFORE WE SAW EACH OTHER AGAIN..."

WHICH DO YOU THINK WAS YOUR GREATER SIN... ?

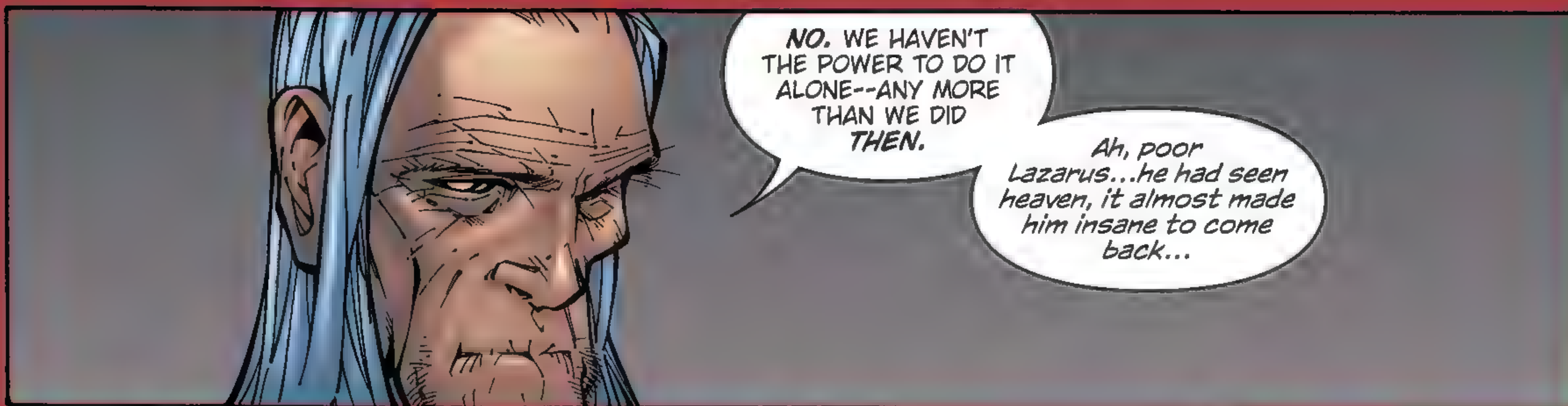
FIGHTING AT LUCIFER'S SIDE, OR CREATING ME AND MY... OFFSPRING?



IF THIS BARRIER STANDS ANY LONGER, WE WILL DISSIPATE INTO NOTHINGNESS... TO SAY NOTHING OF ZOPHIEL'S SOUL...

CAN'T WE... BRING HER BACK TO HUMAN LIFE... AS WE DID WITH LAZARUS... ?



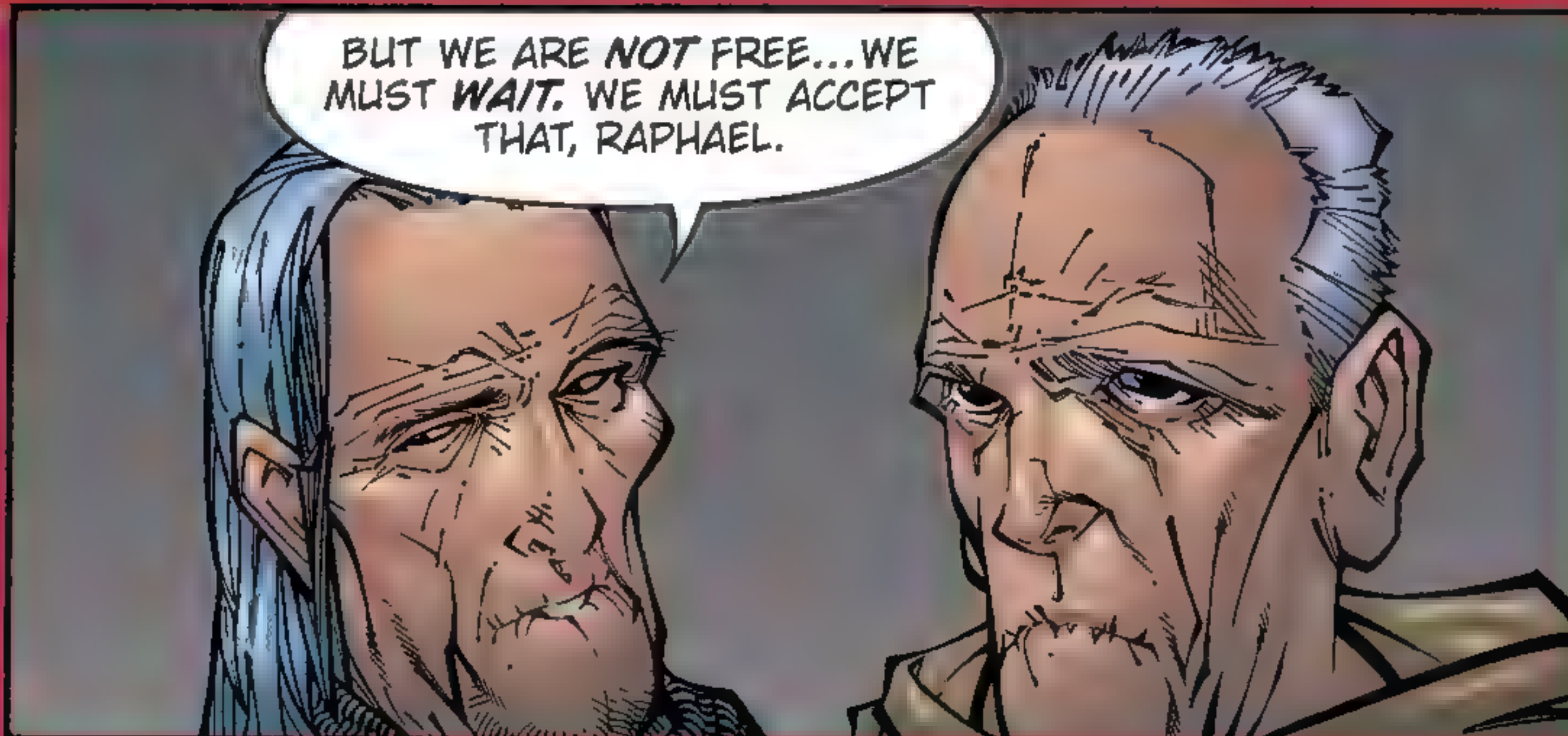


NO. WE HAVEN'T
THE POWER TO DO IT
ALONE--ANY MORE
THAN WE DID
THEN.

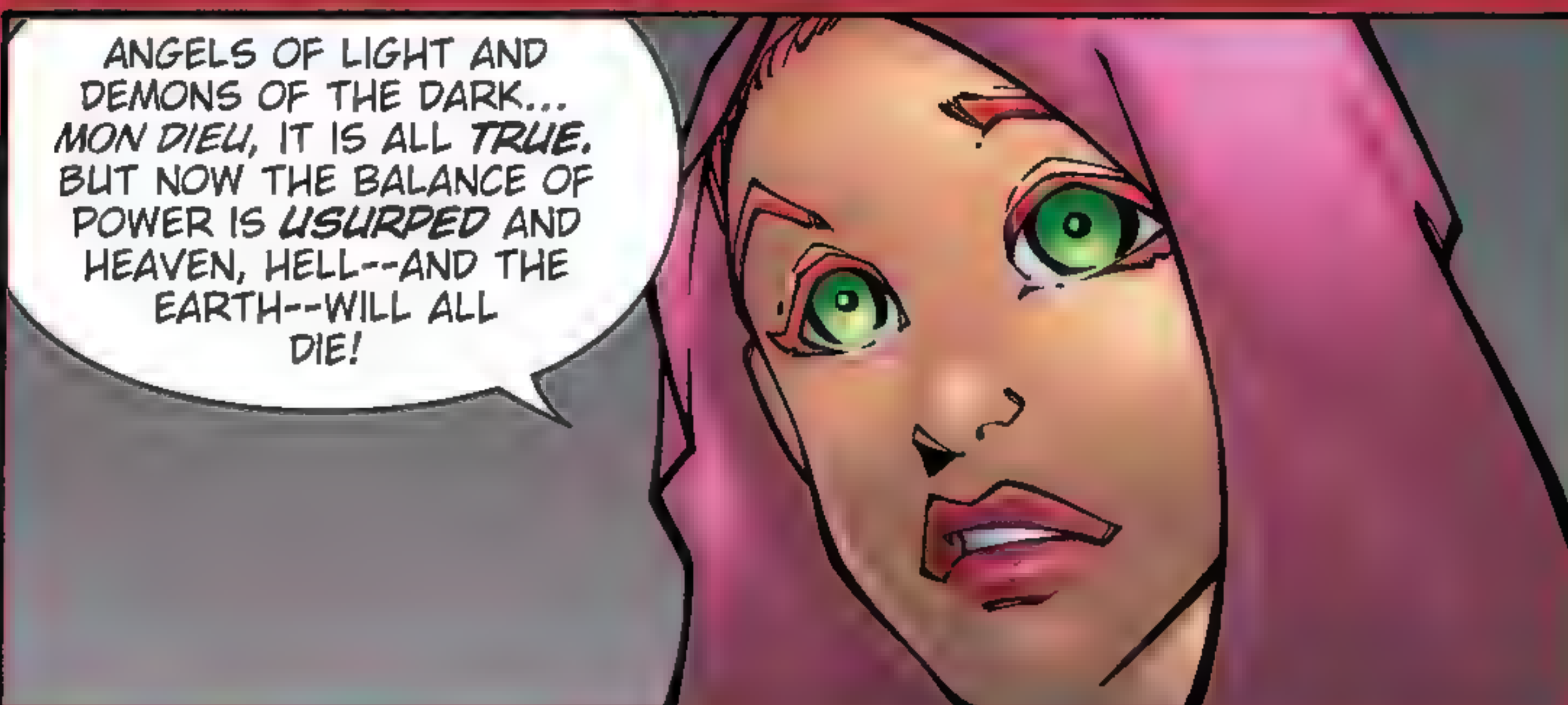
Ah, poor
Lazarus...he had seen
heaven, it almost made
him insane to come
back...



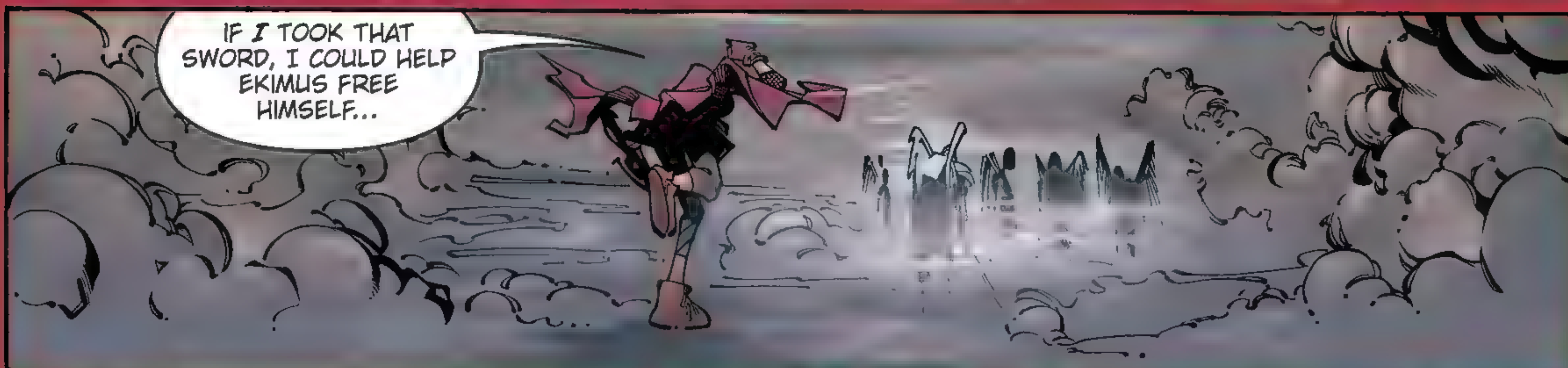
ZOPHIEL'S **ANGELIC
SWORD**--THE WRATH OF
GOD FORGED IN STEEL.
MIGHT IT TILT THE BALANCE
IF WE WERE FREE TO
ACT...?



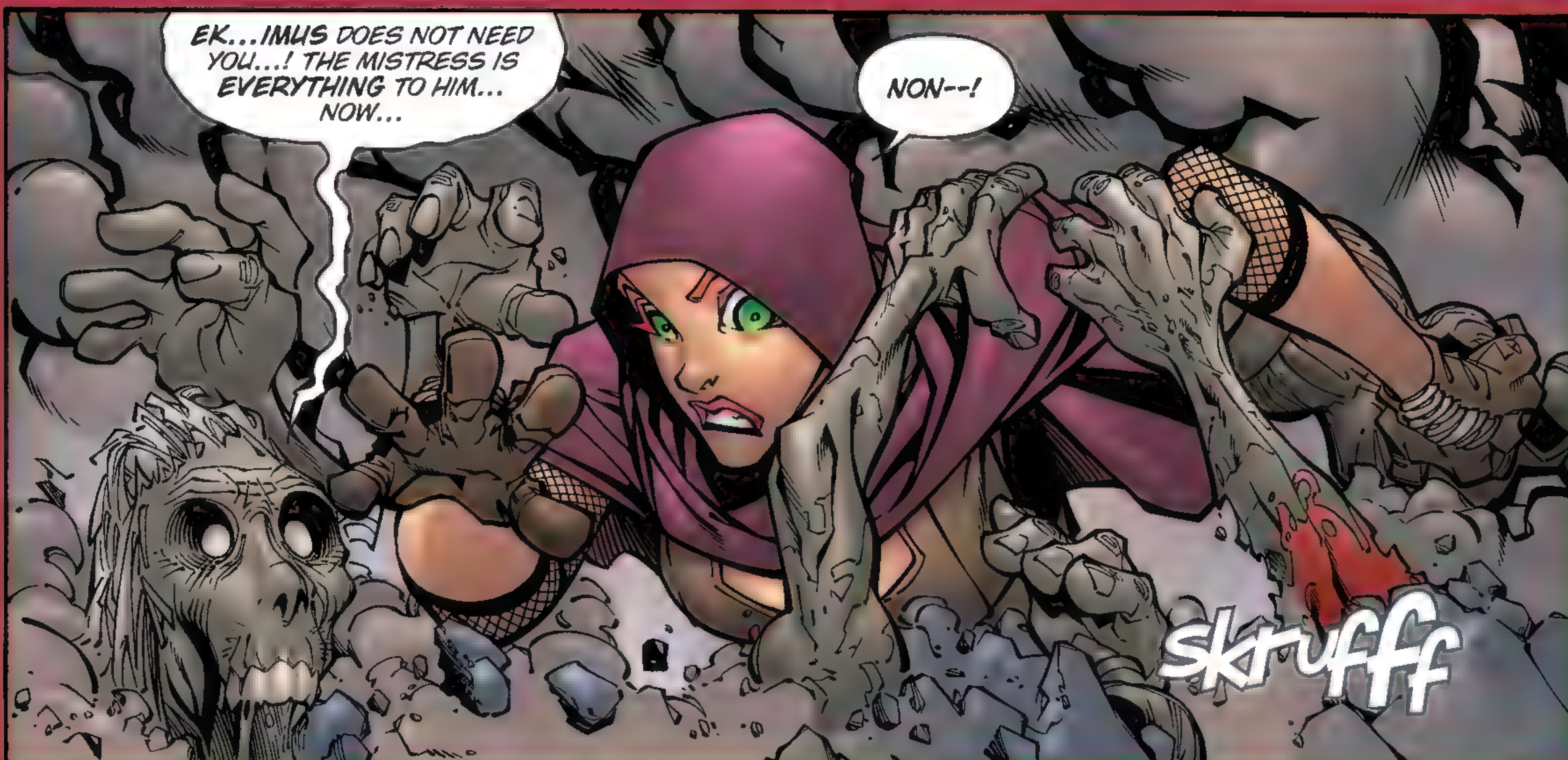
BUT WE ARE **NOT** FREE...WE
MUST **WAIT**. WE MUST ACCEPT
THAT, RAPHAEL.



ANGELS OF LIGHT AND
DEMONS OF THE DARK...
MON DIEU, IT IS ALL **TRUE**.
BUT NOW THE BALANCE OF
POWER IS **USURPED** AND
HEAVEN, HELL--AND THE
EARTH--WILL ALL
DIE!



IF I TOOK THAT
SWORD, I COULD HELP
EKIMUS FREE
HIMSELF...



EK...IMUS DOES NOT NEED
YOU...! THE MISTRESS IS
EVERYTHING TO HIM...
NOW...

NON--!

skrufff



GET OFF--!!



DON'T WORRY, SCARLET... I'M HERE!

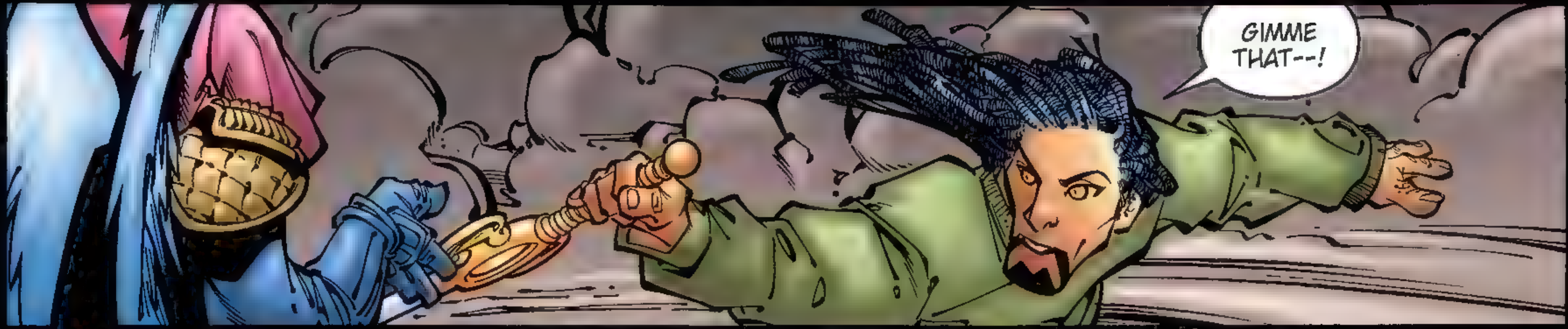
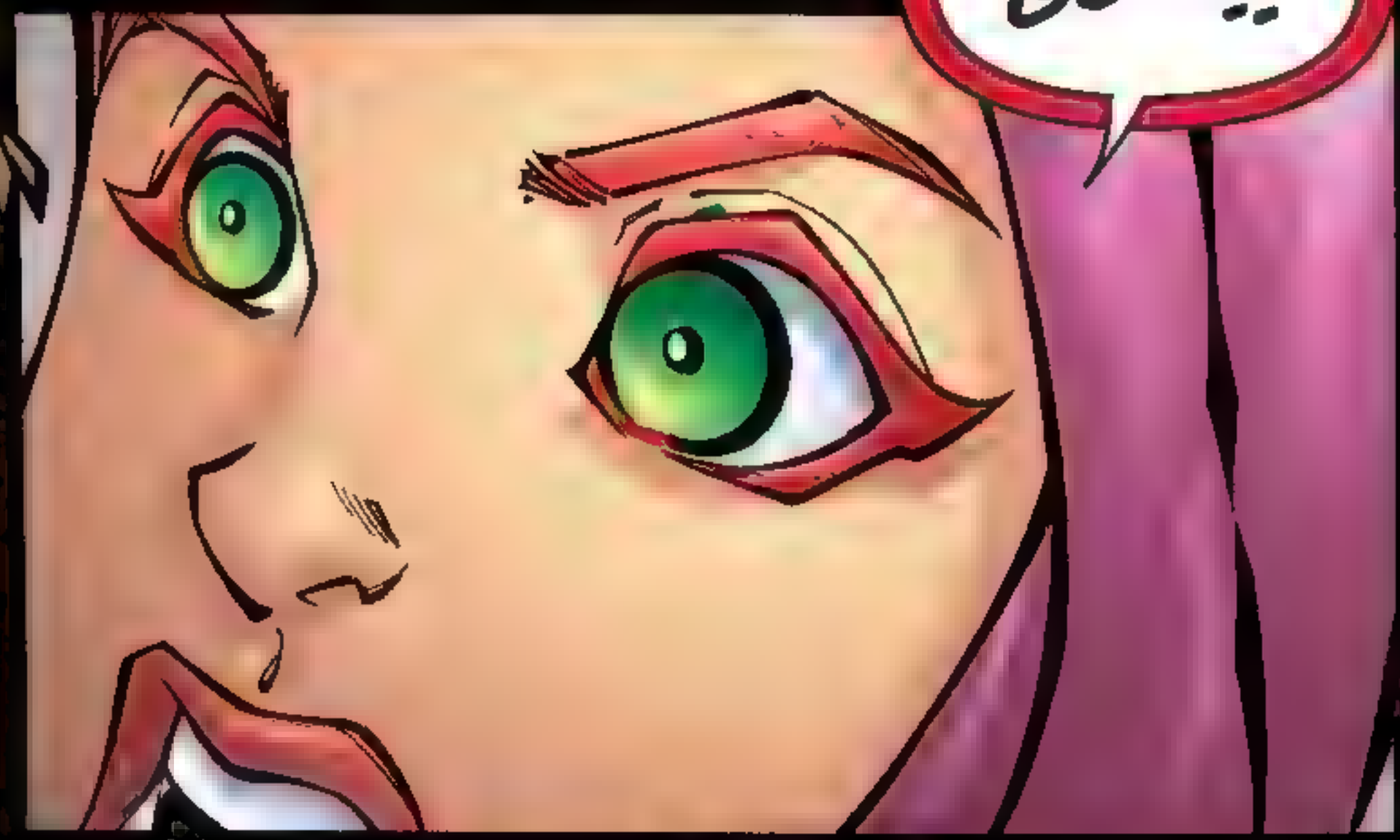
JOE---! THANK GOD!



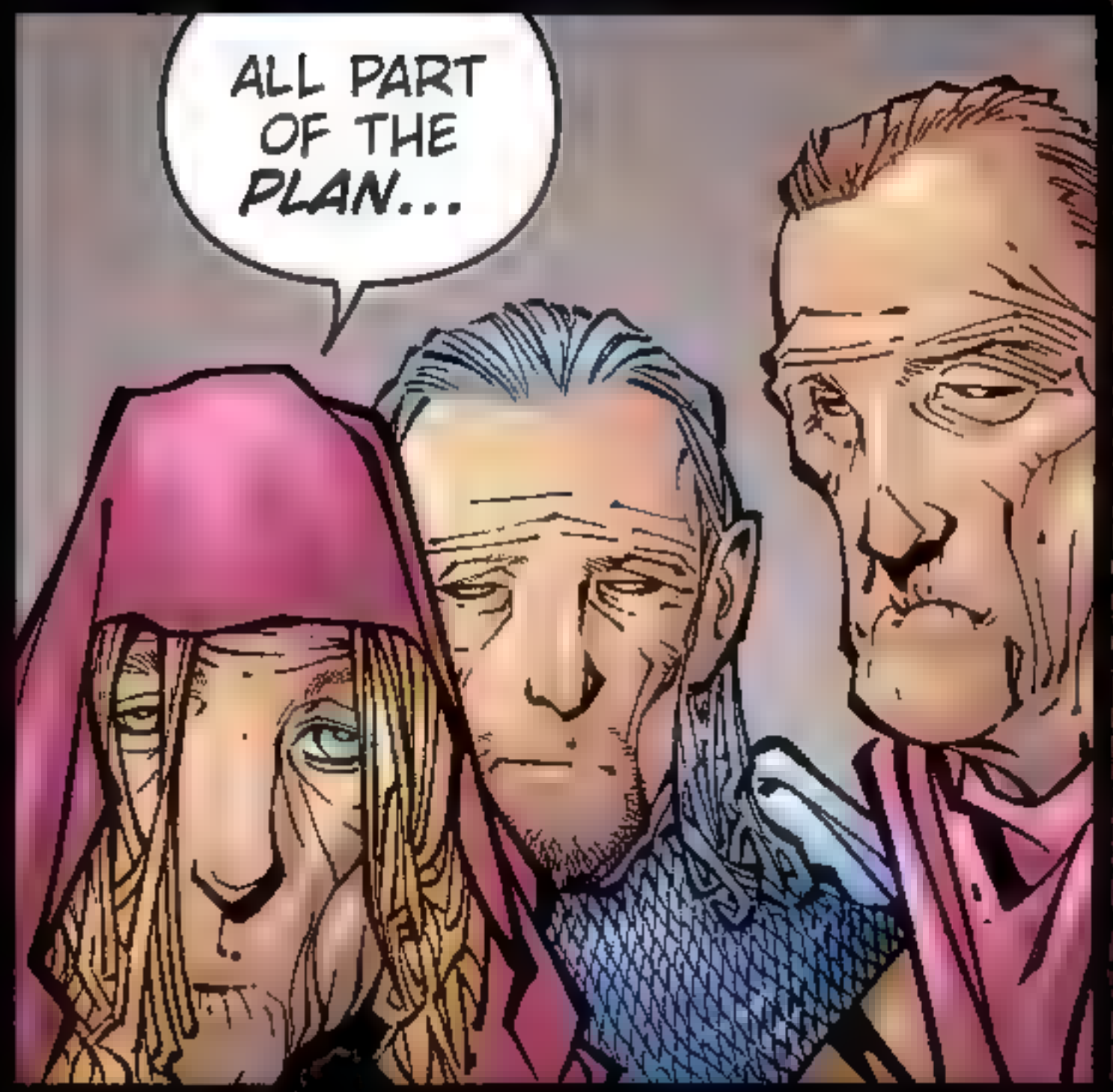
GET THE ANGEL SWORD TO EKKIE--- IT IS HIS ONLY CHANCE!

BUT... ROSITA...?

GO--!!



GIMME THAT--!



ALL PART OF THE PLAN...



HOLD ON, EKKIE---I'M COMING!!



--LNNNNN--!

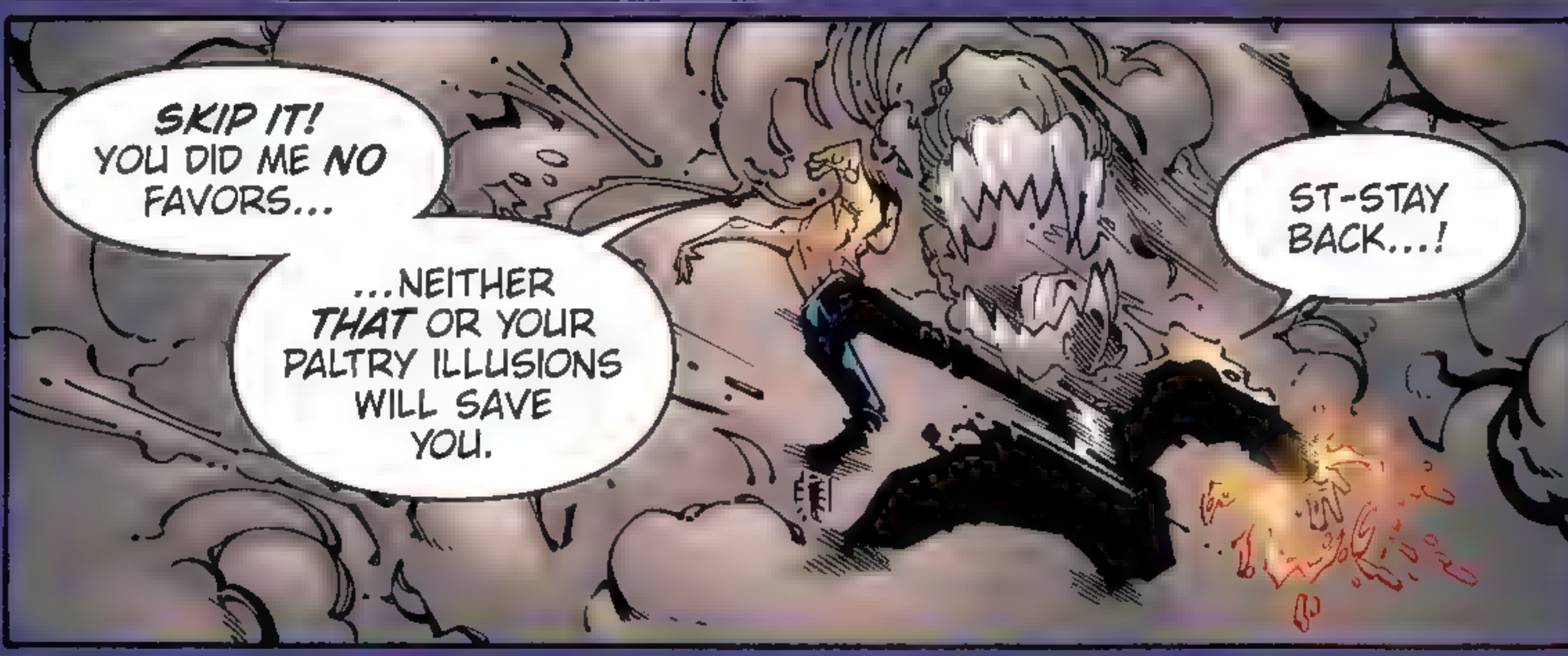


YOU MADE A BAD MISTAKE, VAN FLEET...

THREATENING MY FAMILY ONLY MADE ME **ANGRY...**



TH-THEN IN A WAY, YOU OWE ME--NOW PERHAPS YOU CAN FACE LISSETH FIRED UP...



SKIP IT! YOU DID ME NO FAVORS...

...NEITHER **THAT** OR YOUR PALTRY ILLUSIONS WILL SAVE YOU.

ST-STAY BACK...!

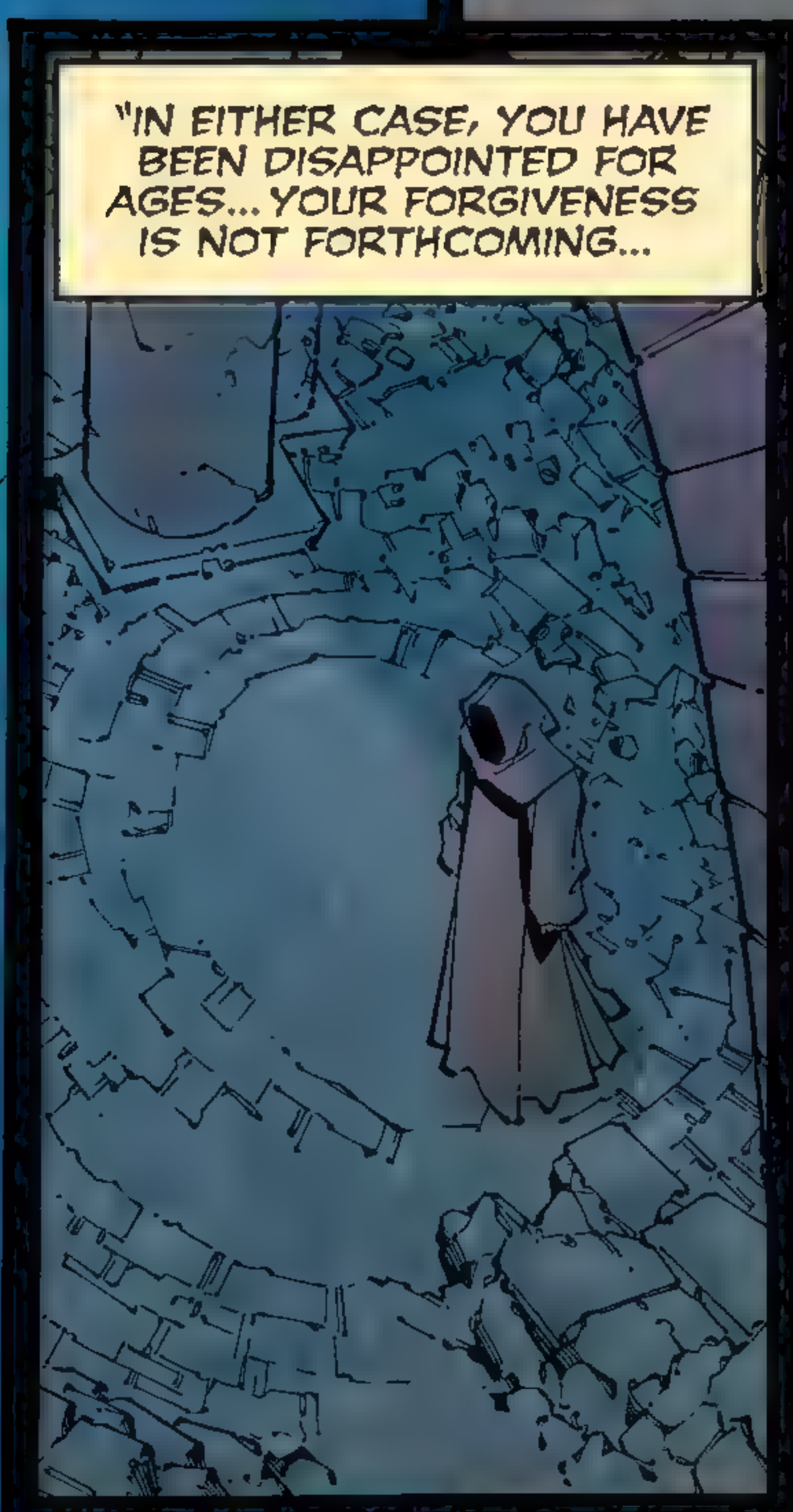


AIEEE--!



"YOU WERE HAUNTED BY THE
GUILT OF WHAT WE BROUGHT
INTO THE WORLD..."

"...DID YOU EXPECT TO FIND SOLACE...
OR FORGIVENESS IN THOSE
ABANDONED CHURCHES...
YOU LIKE SO MUCH?"



"IN EITHER CASE, YOU HAVE
BEEN DISAPPOINTED FOR
AGES... YOUR FORGIVENESS
IS NOT FORTHCOMING..."



"OH, I KNOW WHAT YOU
THINK THE VISION OFFERED
YOU... BUT IT WAS A MAD
DELUSION, NOT DIVINE
INTERVENTION!"

"DID YOU REALLY BELIEVE YOU
COULD EARN YOUR WAY BACK TO
PARADISE BY RAISING 'CHOSEN'
CHAMPIONS AGAINST ME?"



"IF SO, THEIR DEATHS AND
DEFLECTIONS MUST HAVE
BEEN A BLOW..."

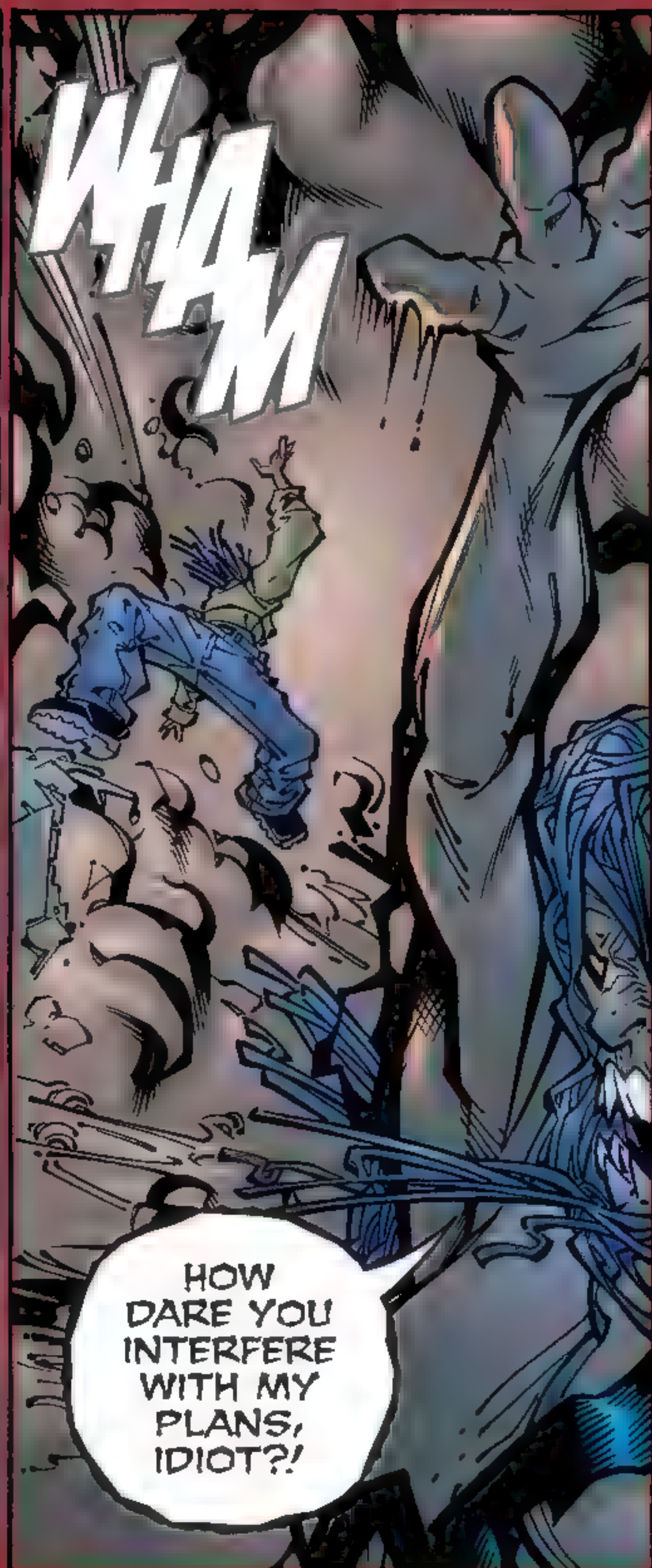


THERE IS NO
FORGIVENESS FOR
SUCH AS US, EKIMUS...
AND THERE IS POWER
AND FREEDOM IN
ACCEPTING THAT
IMMUTABLE
FACT.

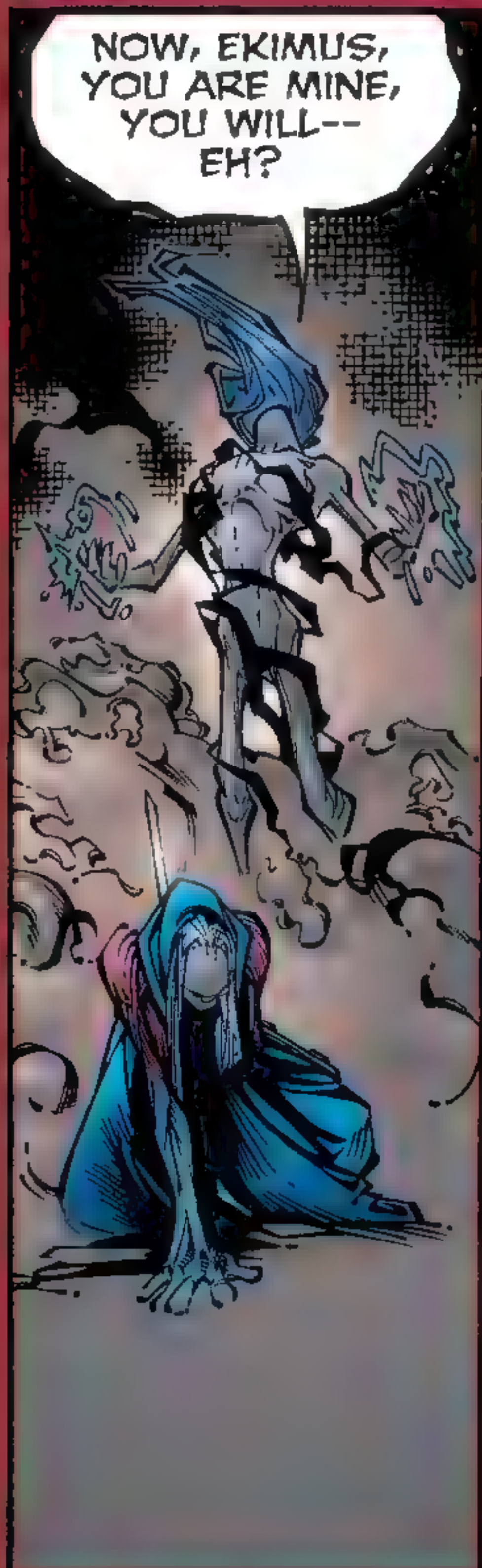


HOPE
THIS BREAKS
THE WITCH'S
SPELL WITHOUT
KILLING YOU,
OLD MAN!

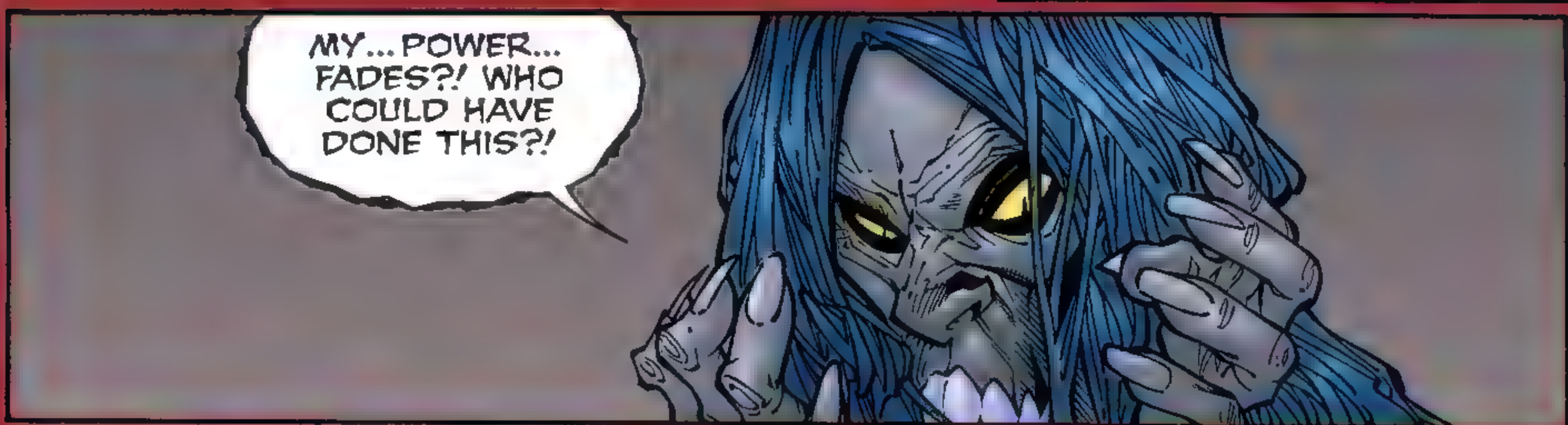
AHHHHH--!



HOW
DARE YOU
INTERFERE
WITH MY
PLANS,
IDIOT?!



NOW, EKIMUS,
YOU ARE MINE,
YOU WILL--
EH?



MY... POWER...
FADES?! WHO
COULD HAVE
DONE THIS?!

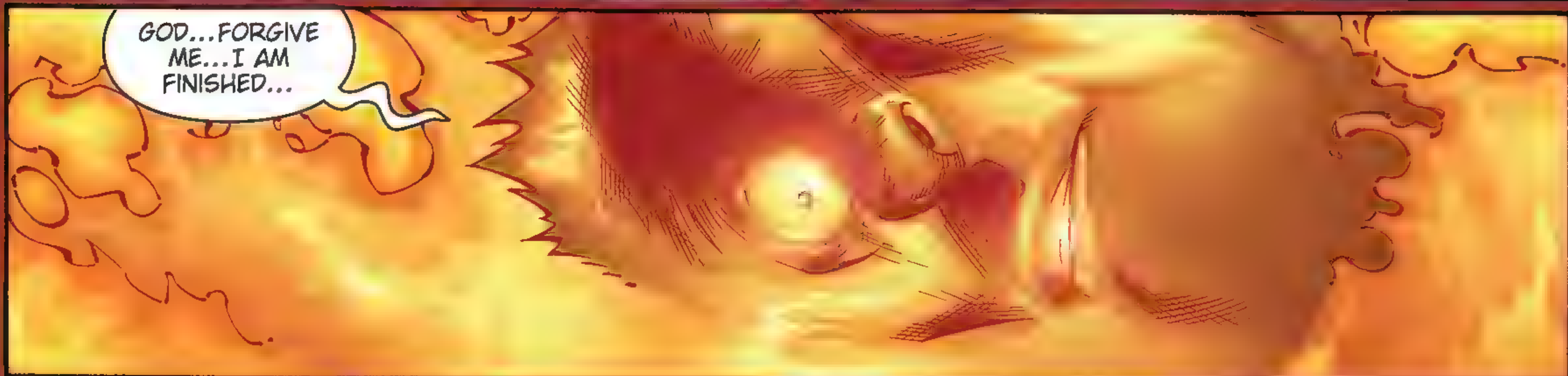


FWAASH

YOU'RE DONE,
VAN FLEET!
TRASHED!



AND
IT'S TIME TO
BURN THE
TRASH--!



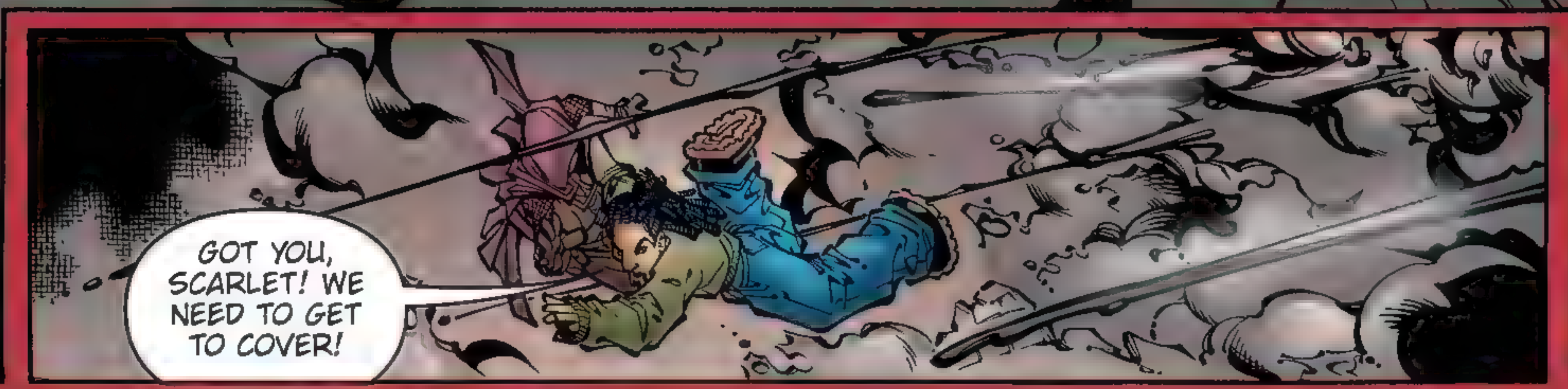
GOD... FORGIVE
ME... I AM
FINISHED...



I WILL NOT
BE THWARTED--
I STILL HAVE
POWER ENOUGH
TO END THIS
STALEMATE!

I WILL
DESTROY
THE EARTH AND
REMAKE IT IN MY
IMAGE--FREE
FROM HEAVEN
AND HELL!

NONE
OF YOU CAN
STOP ME
NOW!



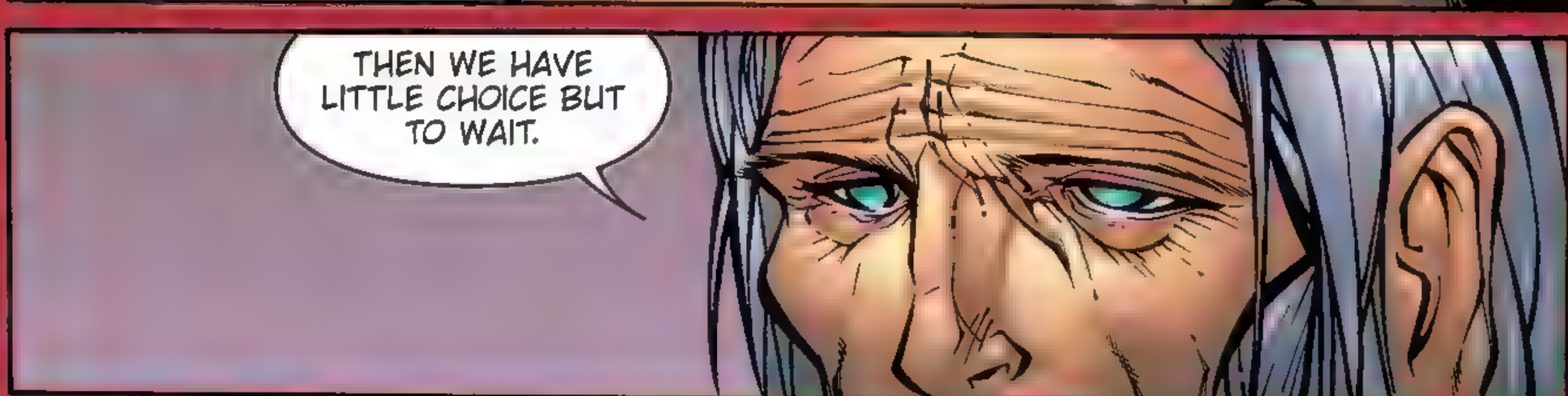
GOT YOU,
SCARLET! WE
NEED TO GET
TO COVER!



YOW!
D'WE MAKE
IT?!



MICHAEL,
OUR POWER
DWINDES EVEN
MORE--SOON OUR
SHIELD WILL FADE!

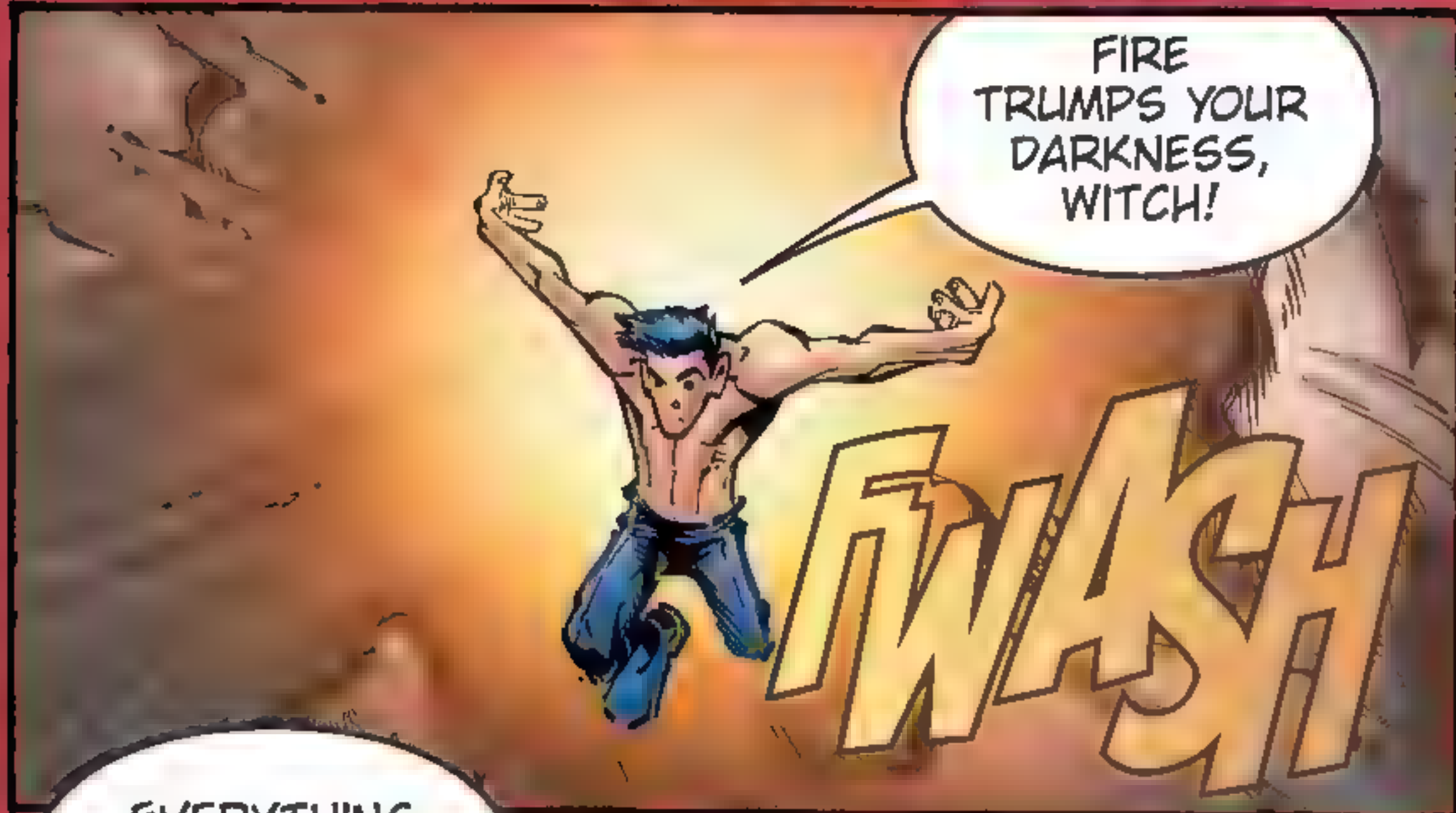


THEN WE HAVE
LITTLE CHOICE BUT
TO WAIT.



FACE ME,
LISSETH! IT'S
JUST YOU AND
ME NOW--!

AND YOU
KNOW I'M THE
ONE WHO CAN
HURT YOU
MOST!



FIRE
TRUMPS YOUR
DARKNESS,
WITCH!

FWASH



EVERYTHING
BAD THAT'S
HAPPENED TO
ME IS YOUR
FAULT!

NOW
YOU
PAY!!



NO...

AAAAHHHHHHH--!

SWOOSH

OH...
YES!!



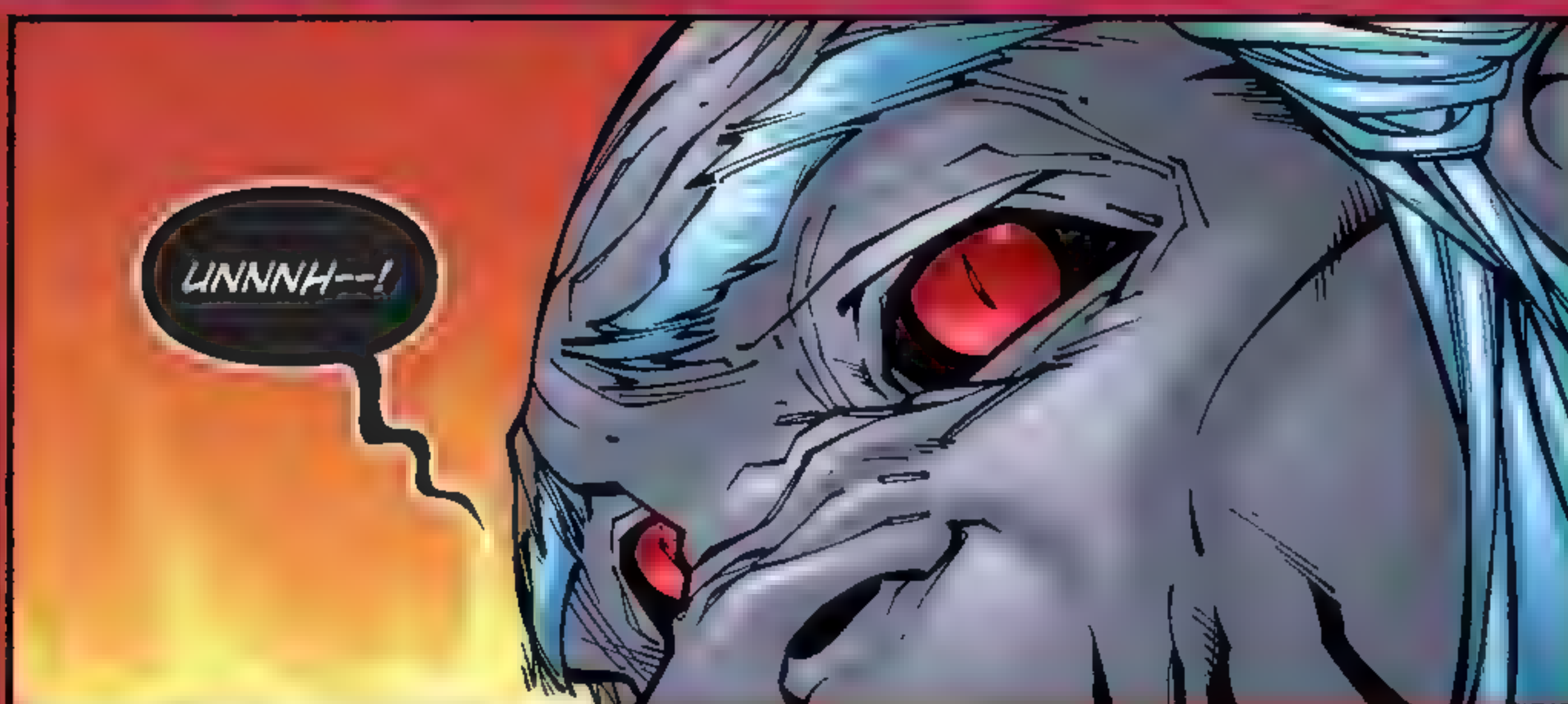


Y-YOUR POWER...!
SO... PURE... SO WHITE
HOT. YOU... ARE... THE
CHOSEN... AREN'T
YOU... ?

I WILL
KILL YOU
HORRIBLY
FOR THIS,
BOY...!



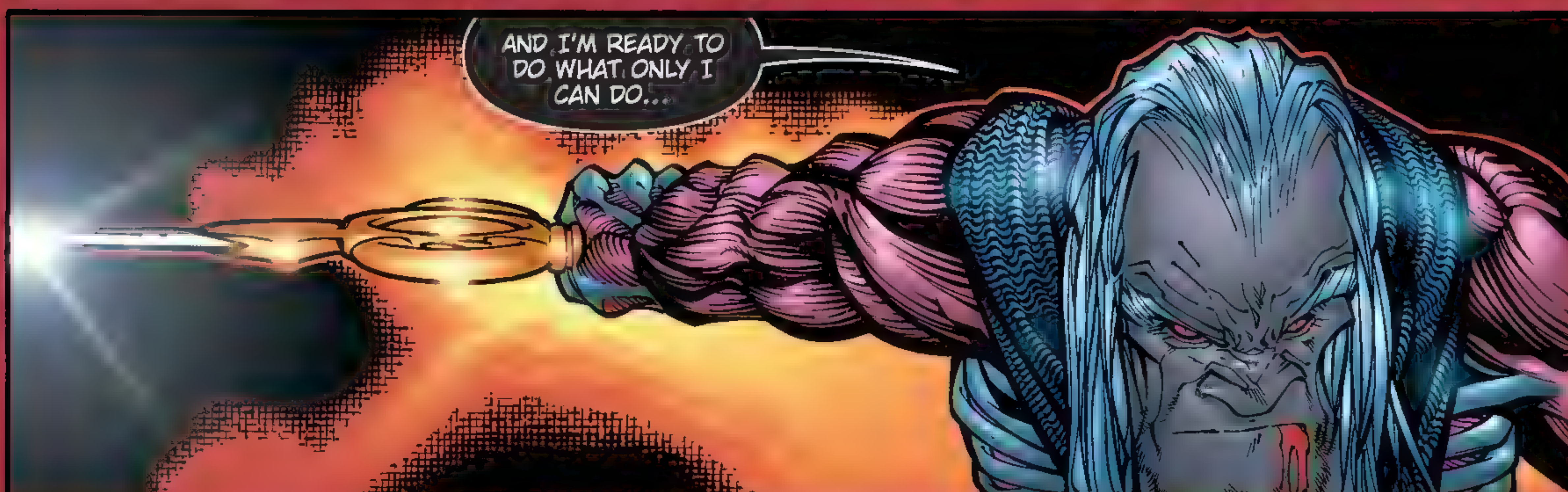
STAY
BACK!



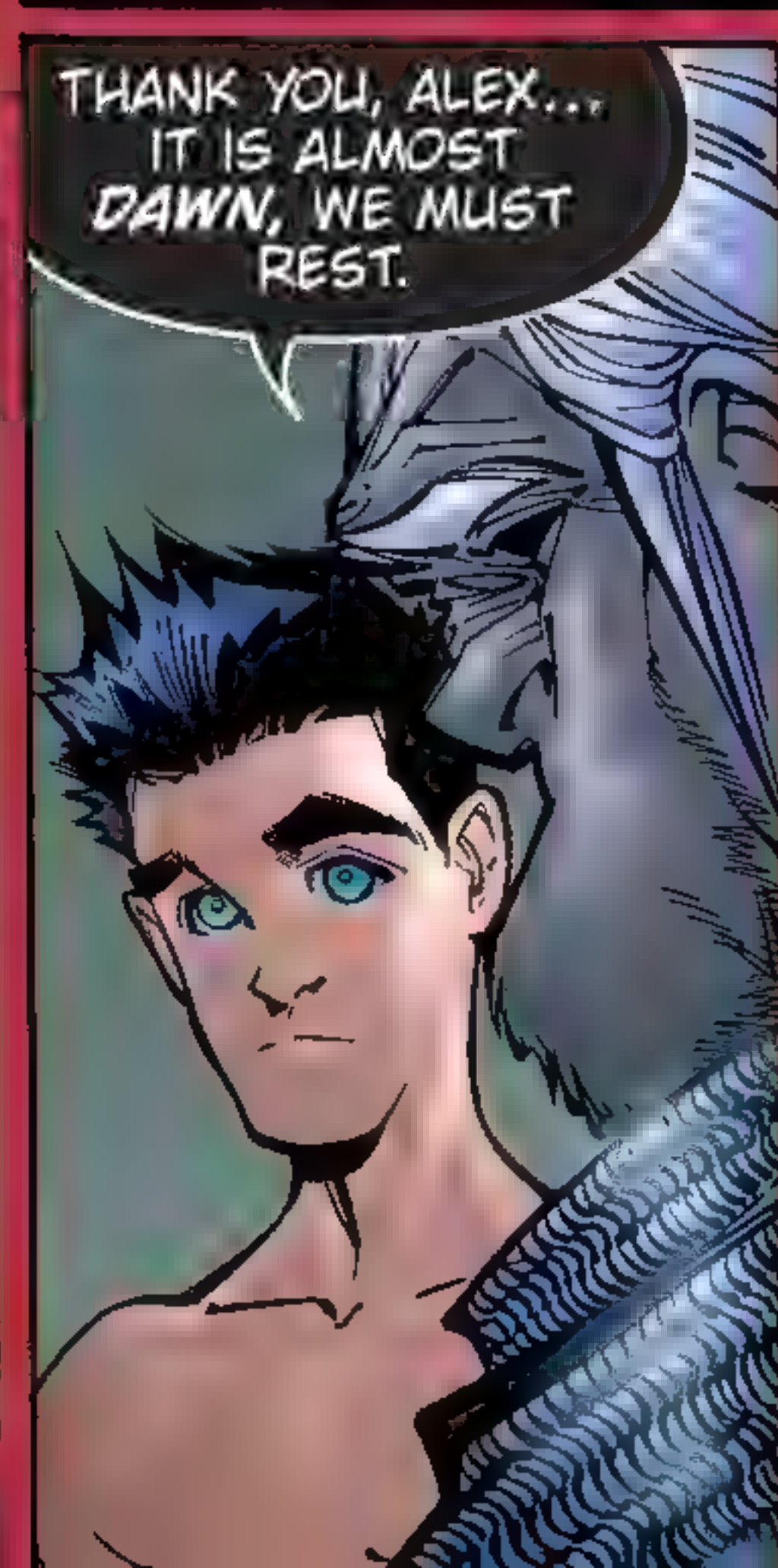
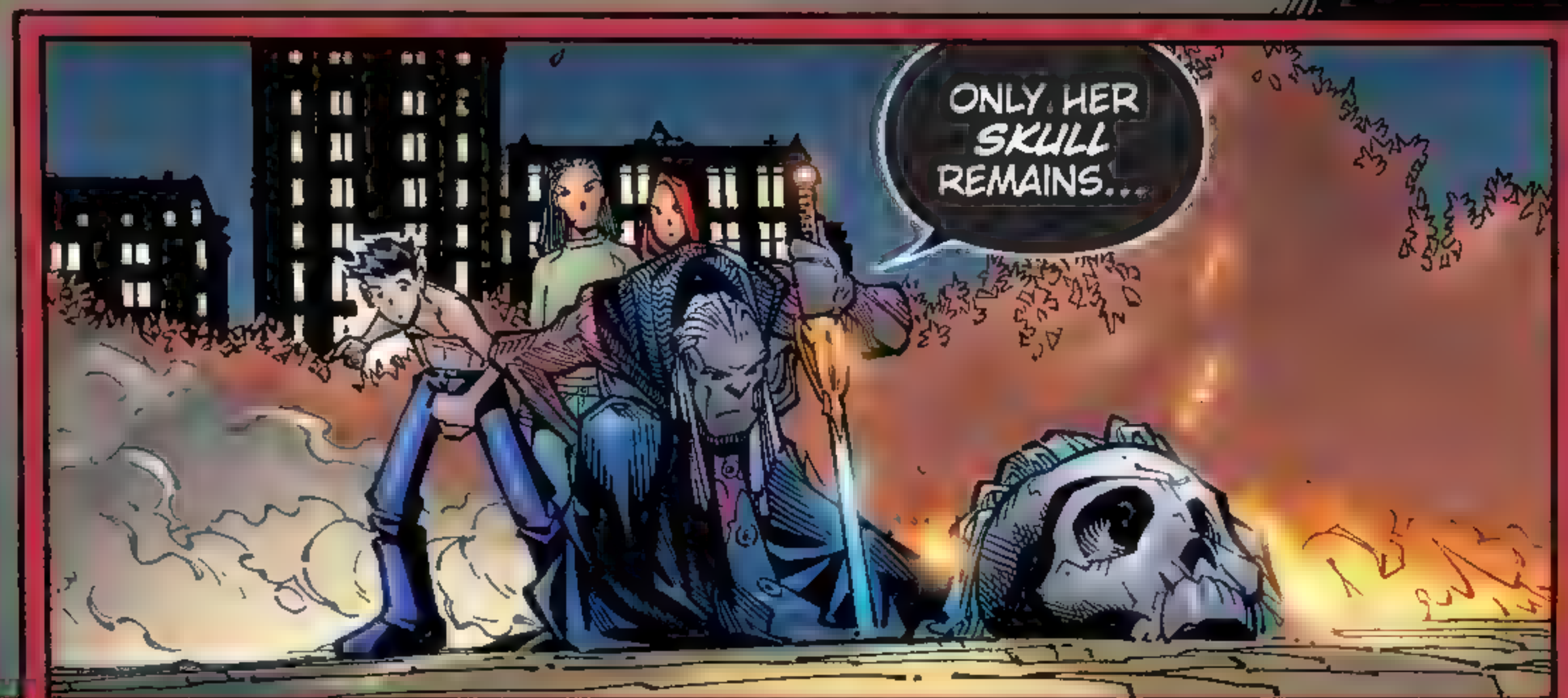
UNNNH--!



ALEX... STAY
STRONG... I...
I... I AM...
HERE!



AND I'M READY TO
DO WHAT ONLY I
CAN DO...



IT WAS INDEED THE
DAWN OF A NEW
DAY...A NEW LIFE.



THE WORLD WOULD HAVE MUCH
TO REBUILD, BUT IT WOULD--AND
QUICKLY--THAT'S WHAT HUMANS
DO IN THE AFTERMATH OF
TRAGEDY...

...THEY MAKE
SURE THAT LIFE
GOES ON.



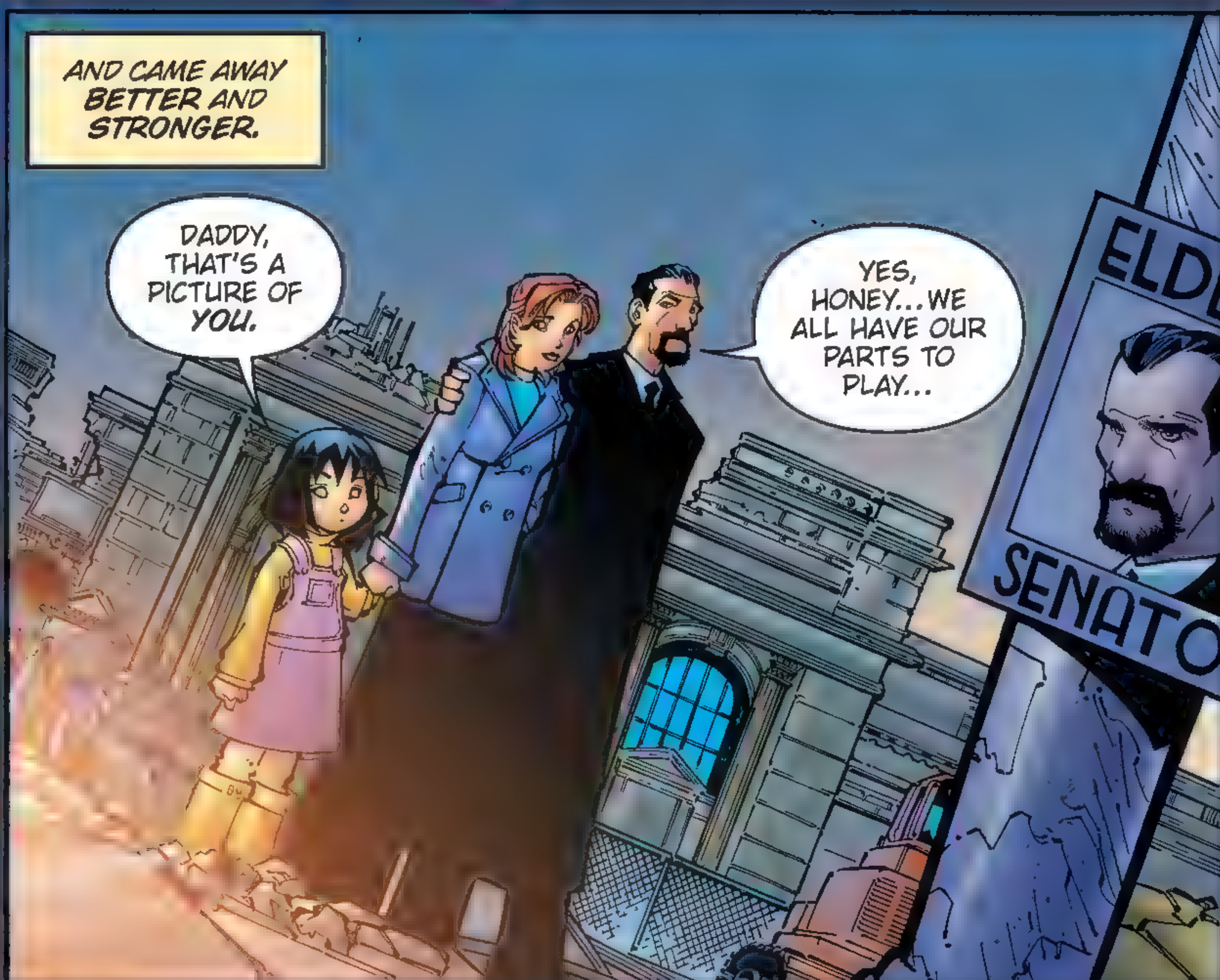
THEY WORKED WITH EVEN
MORE SPEED THIS TIME...
ERASING TRACES OF ALL
THE NIGHTMARES THEY
HAD ENDURED.



HUMANITY WAS CREATED TO
THRIVE AND SURVIVE--AND
THOUGH TESTED OFTEN, IT
ALWAYS ROSE TO THE
CHALLENGE...



AND CAME AWAY
BETTER AND
STRONGER.



DADDY,
THAT'S A
PICTURE OF
YOU.

YES,
HONEY... WE
ALL HAVE OUR
PARTS TO
PLAY...



ALEX AND HIS GUARDIAN,
EKIMUS, FOUND PEACE...

...AND SOON,
ANOTHER
MISSION.



EVEN WITH LISSETH
DEAD, ALEX'S CURSE
REMAINED...HE WAS
STILL A VAMPIRE.

THOUGH HE NO LONGER
THIRSTED FOR BLOOD,
HE SEEMED TO FEED ON
SOME INNER POWER
NOW.

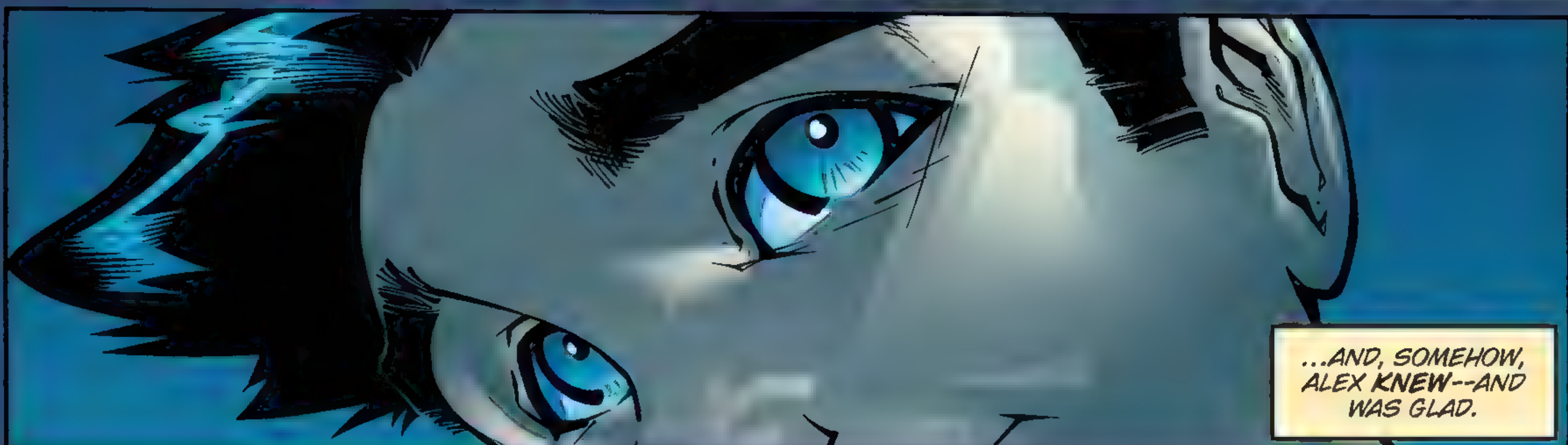


IN THE UNDERCROFT OF THE OLD
CHURCH, A NEW GRAVE WAS MADE
FOR A FALLEN ANGEL...

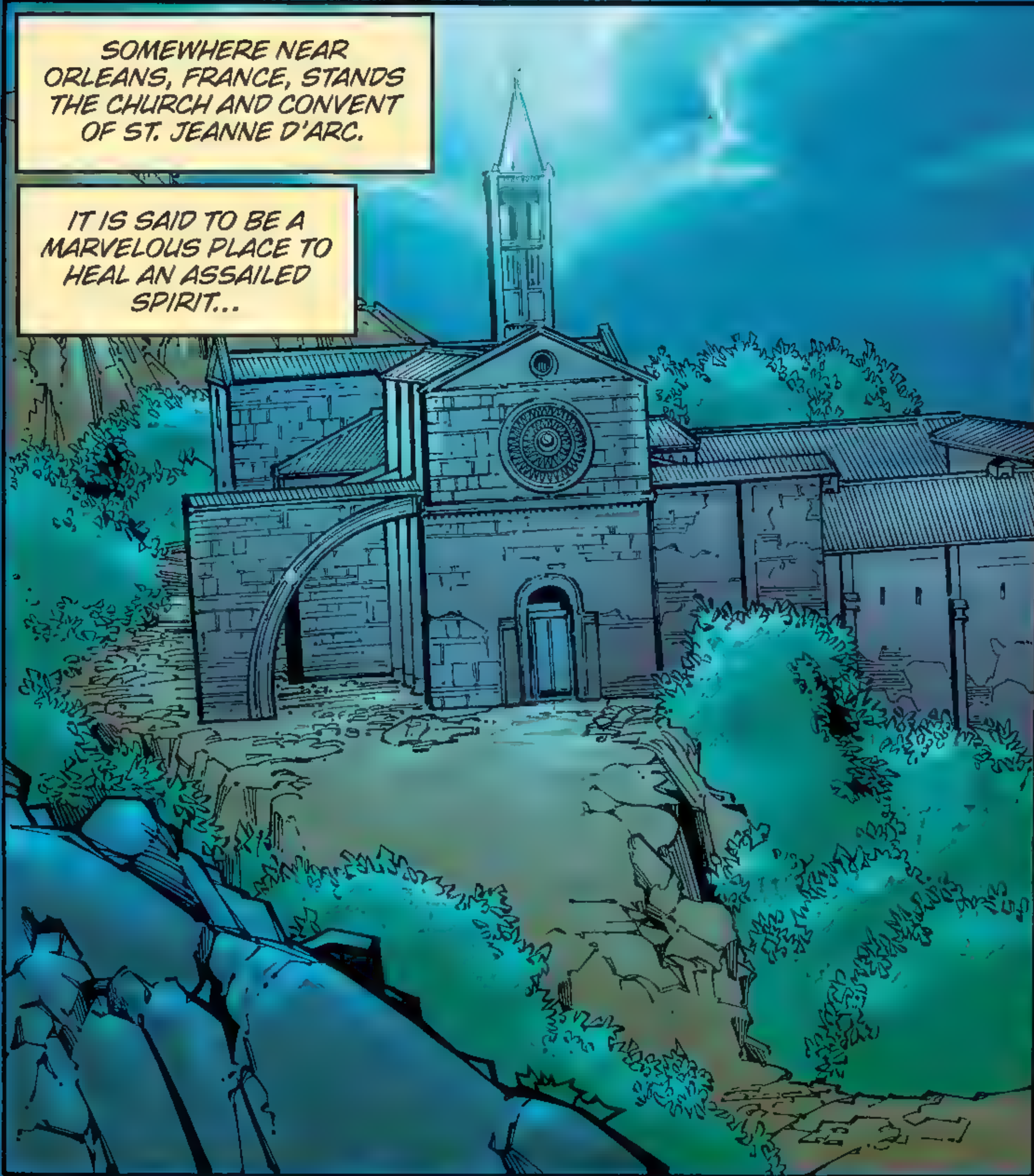
...AND THEY PRAYED THAT ZOPHIEL
HAD INDEED BEEN ACCEPTED BACK
INTO GLORY.



SHE HAD BEEN,
OF COURSE...



...AND, SOMEHOW,
ALEX KNEW--AND
WAS GLAD.

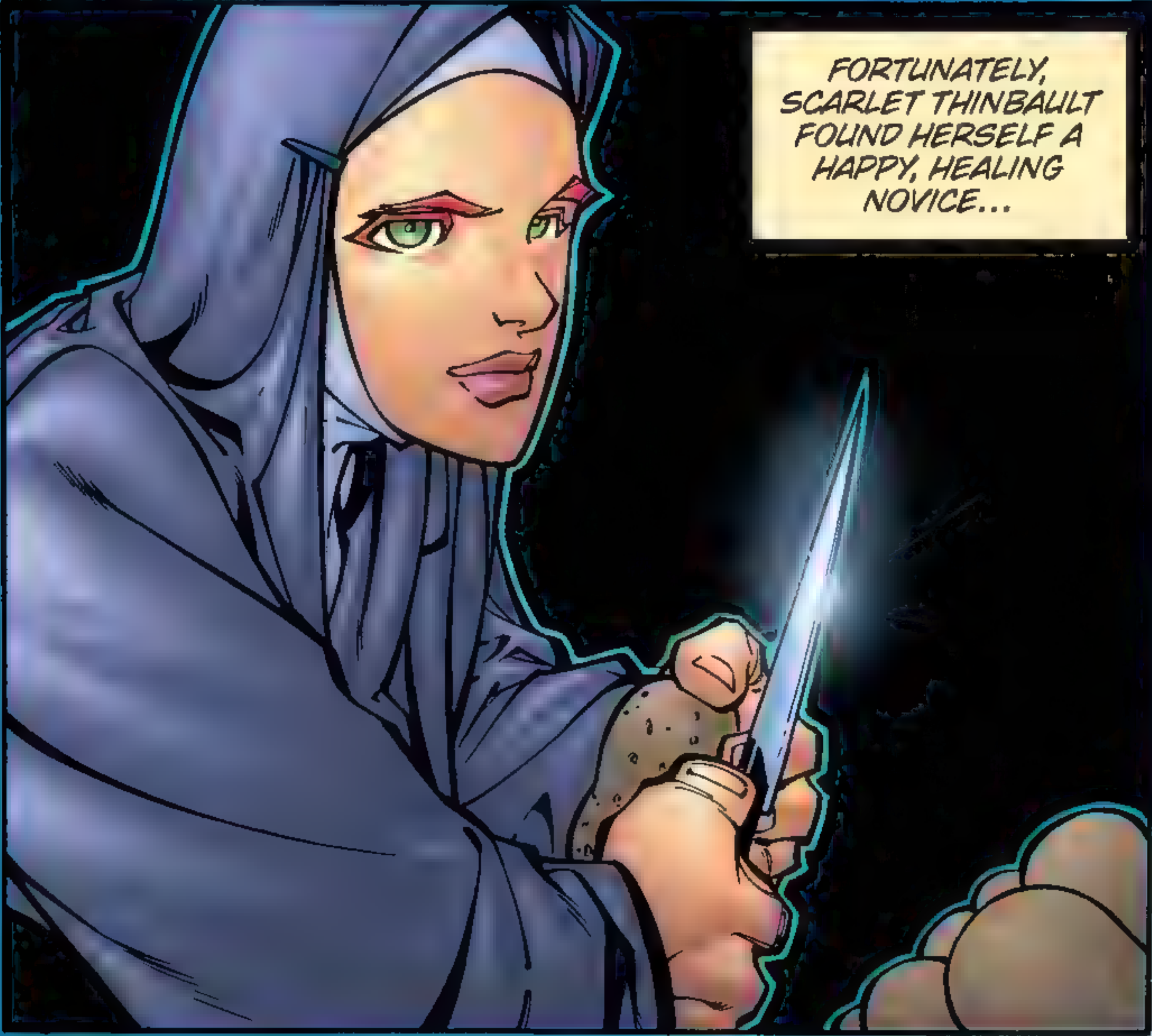


SOMEWHERE NEAR ORLEANS, FRANCE, STANDS THE CHURCH AND CONVENT OF ST. JEANNE D'ARC.

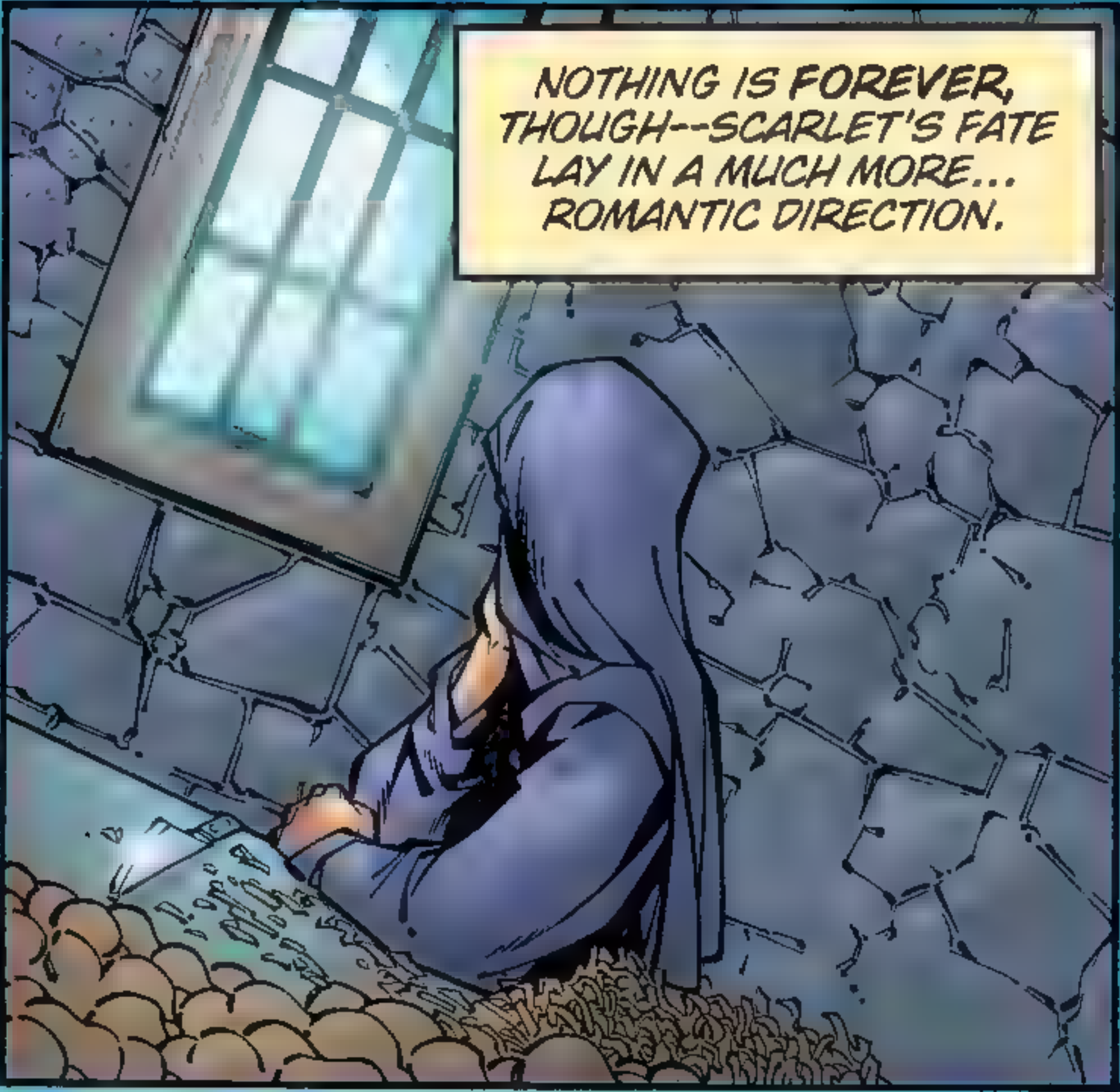
IT IS SAID TO BE A MARVELOUS PLACE TO HEAL AN ASSAILED SPIRIT...



...EVEN AS YOU LOSE YOURSELF IN HOLY WORK.



FORTUNATELY, SCARLET THINBAULT FOUND HERSELF A HAPPY, HEALING NOVICE...



NOTHING IS FOREVER, THOUGH--SCARLET'S FATE LAY IN A MUCH MORE... ROMANTIC DIRECTION.

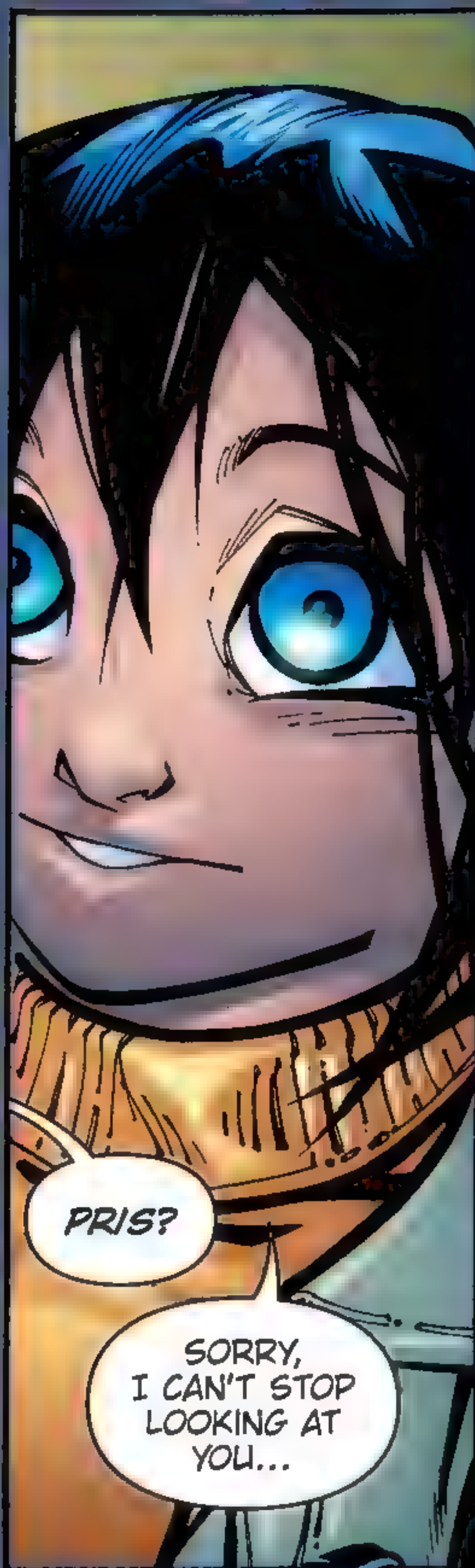
SOME THINGS ARE DESTINED.





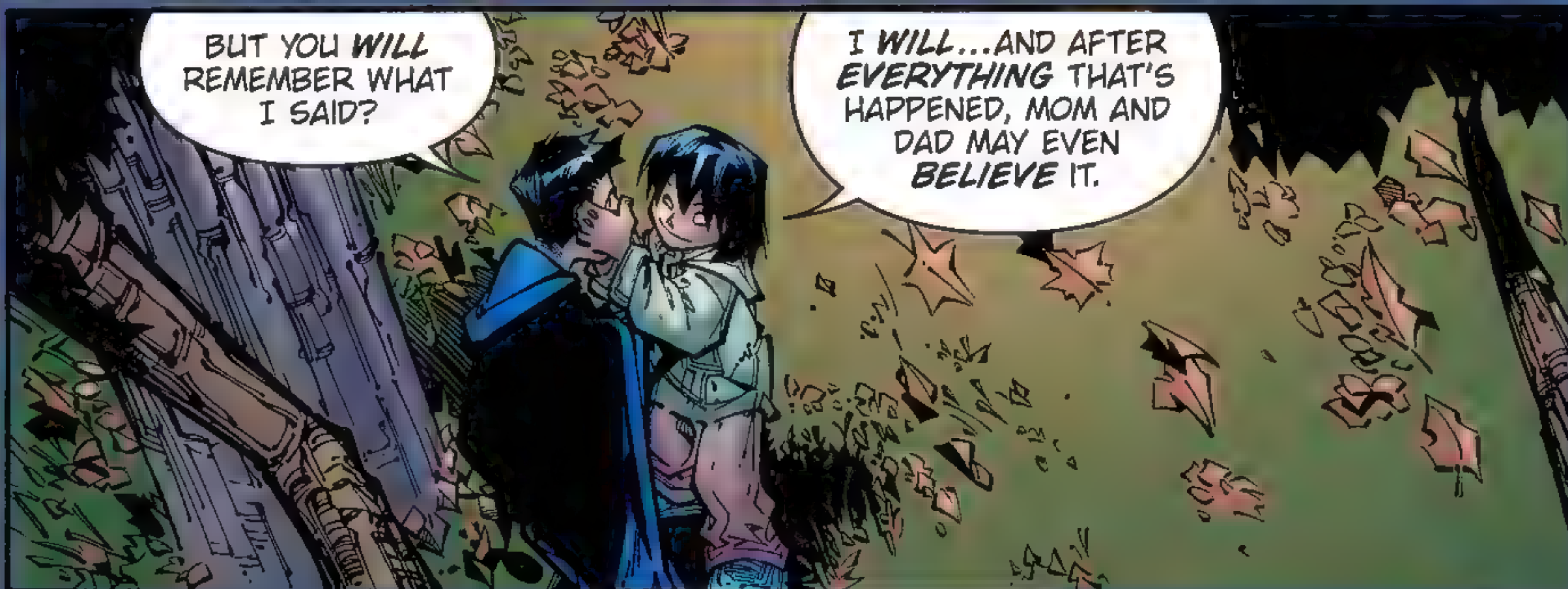
THE CITY'S SOUL IS HEALING, CAN YOU FEEL IT, BILL?

I CAN, DEAR, WE'RE ALL HEALING. SAY...HAVE YOU SEEN--?



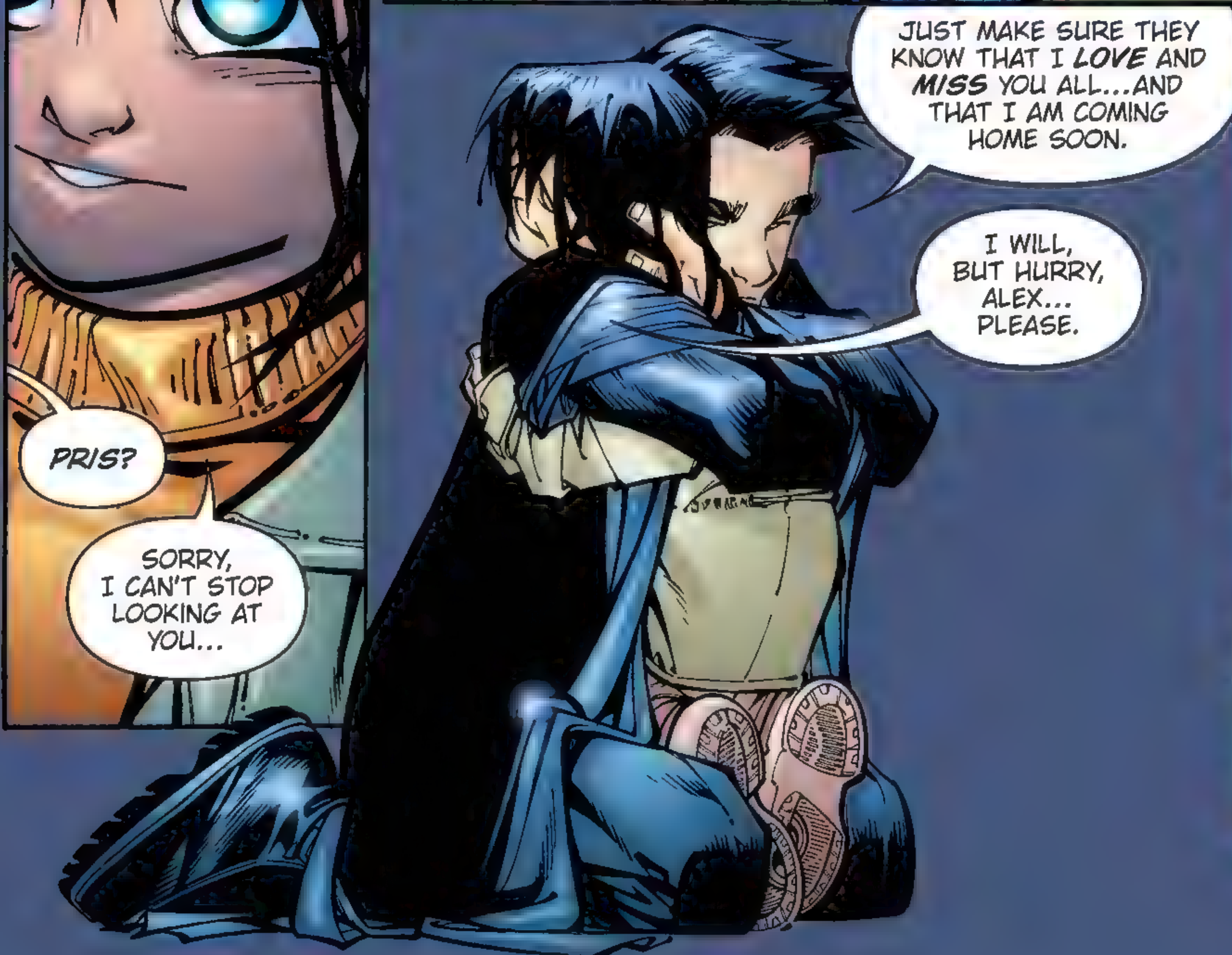
PRIS?

SORRY, I CAN'T STOP LOOKING AT YOU...



BUT YOU WILL REMEMBER WHAT I SAID?

I WILL...AND AFTER EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED, MOM AND DAD MAY EVEN BELIEVE IT.



JUST MAKE SURE THEY KNOW THAT I LOVE AND MISS YOU ALL...AND THAT I AM COMING HOME SOON.

I WILL, BUT HURRY, ALEX... PLEASE.



I'LL DO MY BEST...

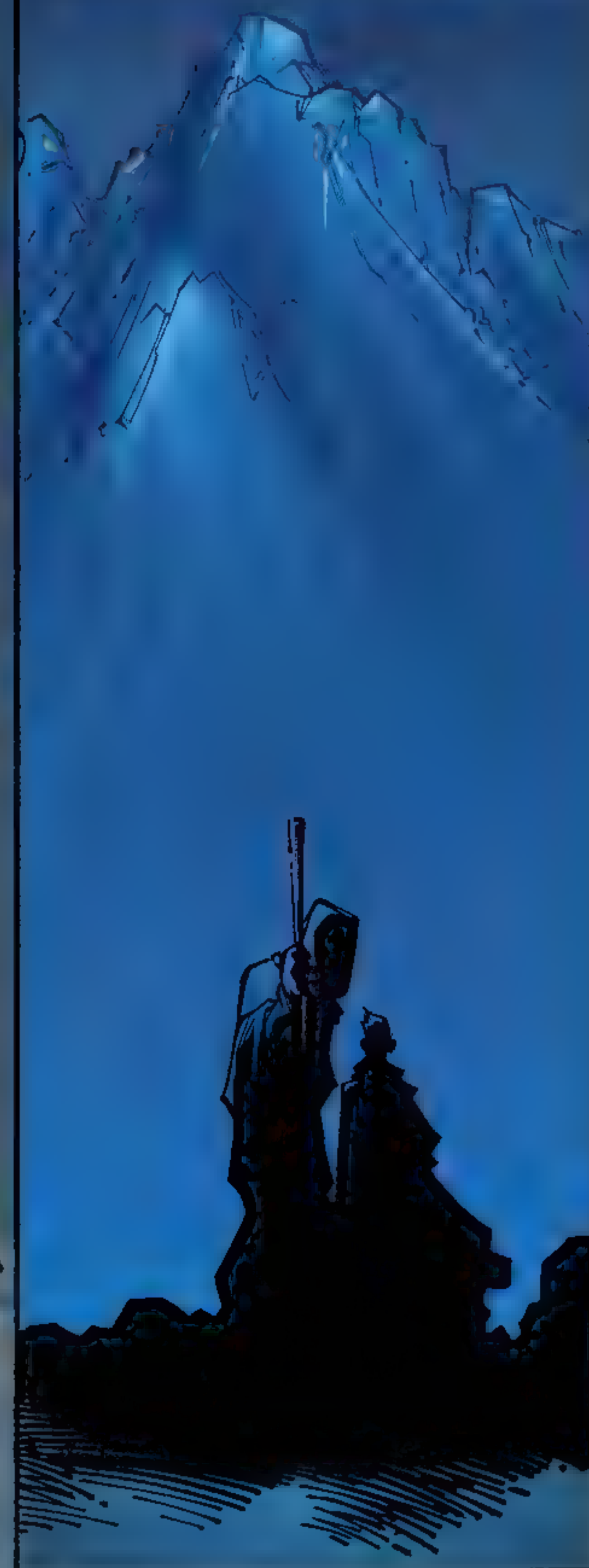
ALEX WILL BE WITH HIS FAMILY--THAT TOO IS HIS DESTINY...

IT IS TIME...

...THOUGH HIS
JOURNEY HOME
WOULD BE LONG
AND CIRCUITOUS.

THE CARBONEK SYMBOL
THAT ZOPHIEL WORE
WAS THE KEY TO FINDING
THE ONE THING THAT
WOULD LEAD TO ALEX'S
CURE--AND EKIMUS'
REDEMPTION...

...THE LEGENDARY
CLIP OF CHRIST--
THE HOLY GRAIL!



FOR WHOEVER WOULD DRINK
FROM THAT SACRED RELIC,
WOULD FIND ETERNAL LIFE
AND AN END TO ALL
CURSES.



"I HEARD HE FOUND IT...BUT I
HAVEN'T SEEN HIM IN A LONG
WHILE, SO..."



WAIT... WAIT...
WAIT... THE HOLY
GRAIL?! S'ALL SILLY
CRAPOLA, BUT YOU HAD
ME RIGHT UP TO THAT
MOMENT!

YOU...
YOU DOUBT MY
WORD, JIMMY?
YOU THINK I'M
LYING?

NAH...
I DOUBT YOUR
NOGGIN... I THINK
YOU'RE CRAZY.



I KNOW HOW
RIDICULOUS IT
SOUNDS, BUT
IT'S ALL
TRUE.



VAMPIRES, ANGELS, PISSED
OFF IMMORTAL WITCHES--
AND POLITICIANS?? NOPE,
SORRY, M'MAN, BUT IT'S
JUST TOO MUCH.



OKAY. I DON'T BLAME
YOU. LE'S GO GET A BURGER
AT MOON DOGGY'S AND I'LL
TELL YOU ABOUT THE TIME I
KILLED AN ANCIENT VAMPIRE
PRIESTESS IN MEXICO...



OKAY, THAT
I CAN GET
BEHIND...

VAN
FLEET--?!



--OH, WELL,
THIS IS NEW YORK...
ANYTHING CAN
HAPPEN.

TELL
ME ABOUT IT
JOE...TELL ME
ABOUT IT.

AND THEY LIVED
HAPPILY EVER
AFTER...

...MORE OR
LESS...

THE EVER-LOVING END!

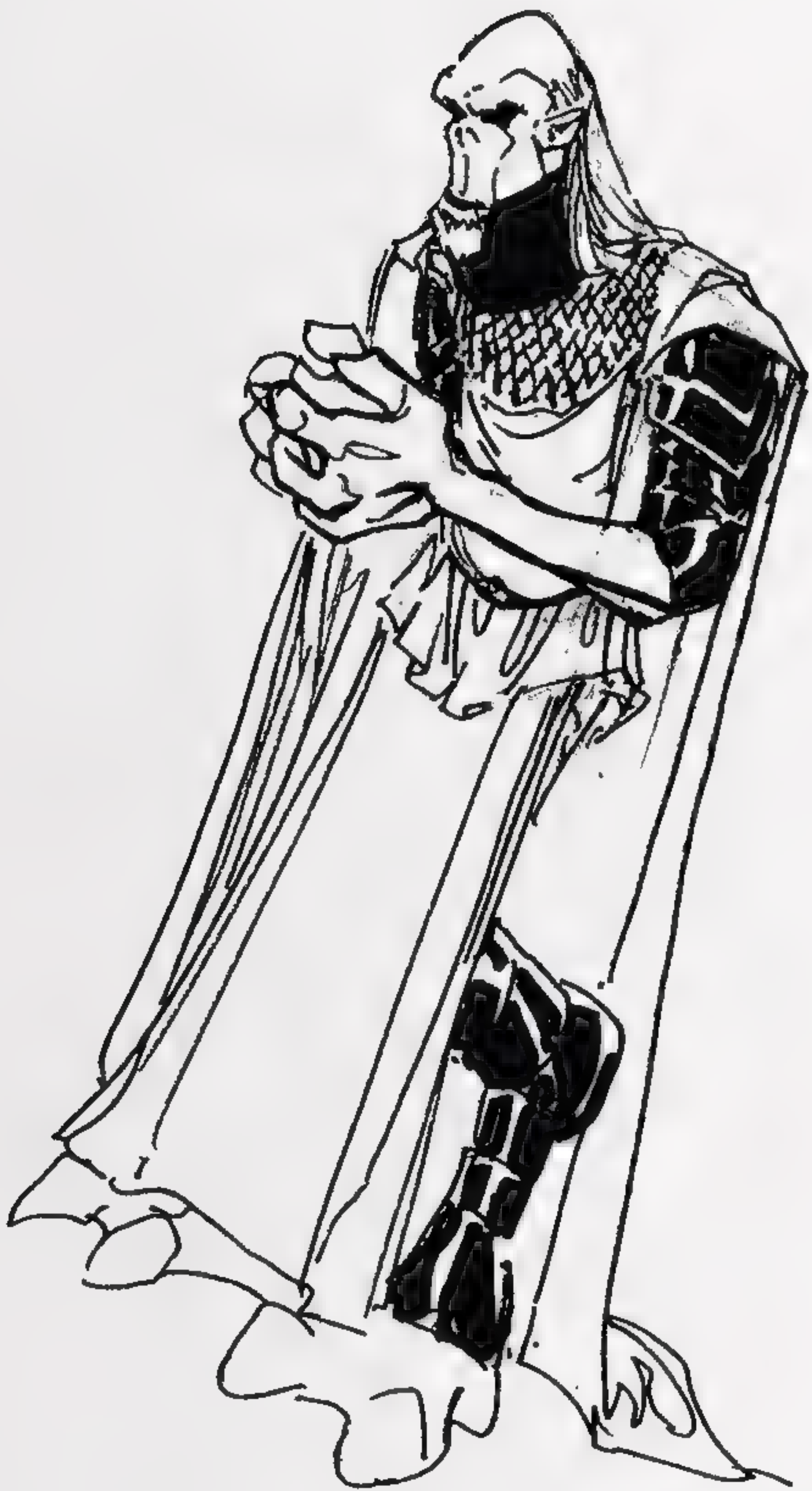
--Thanks to everyone
for a great run!

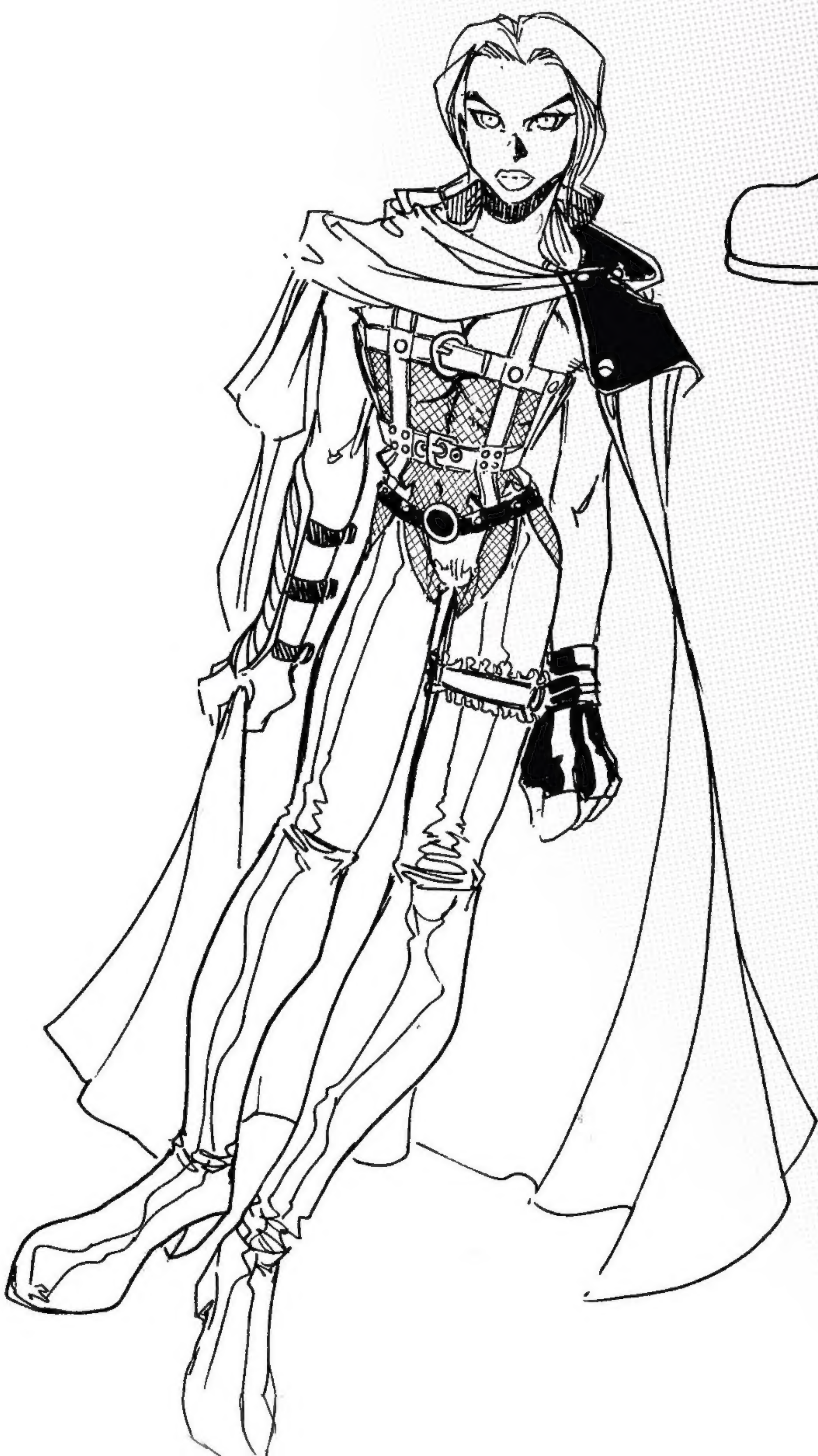
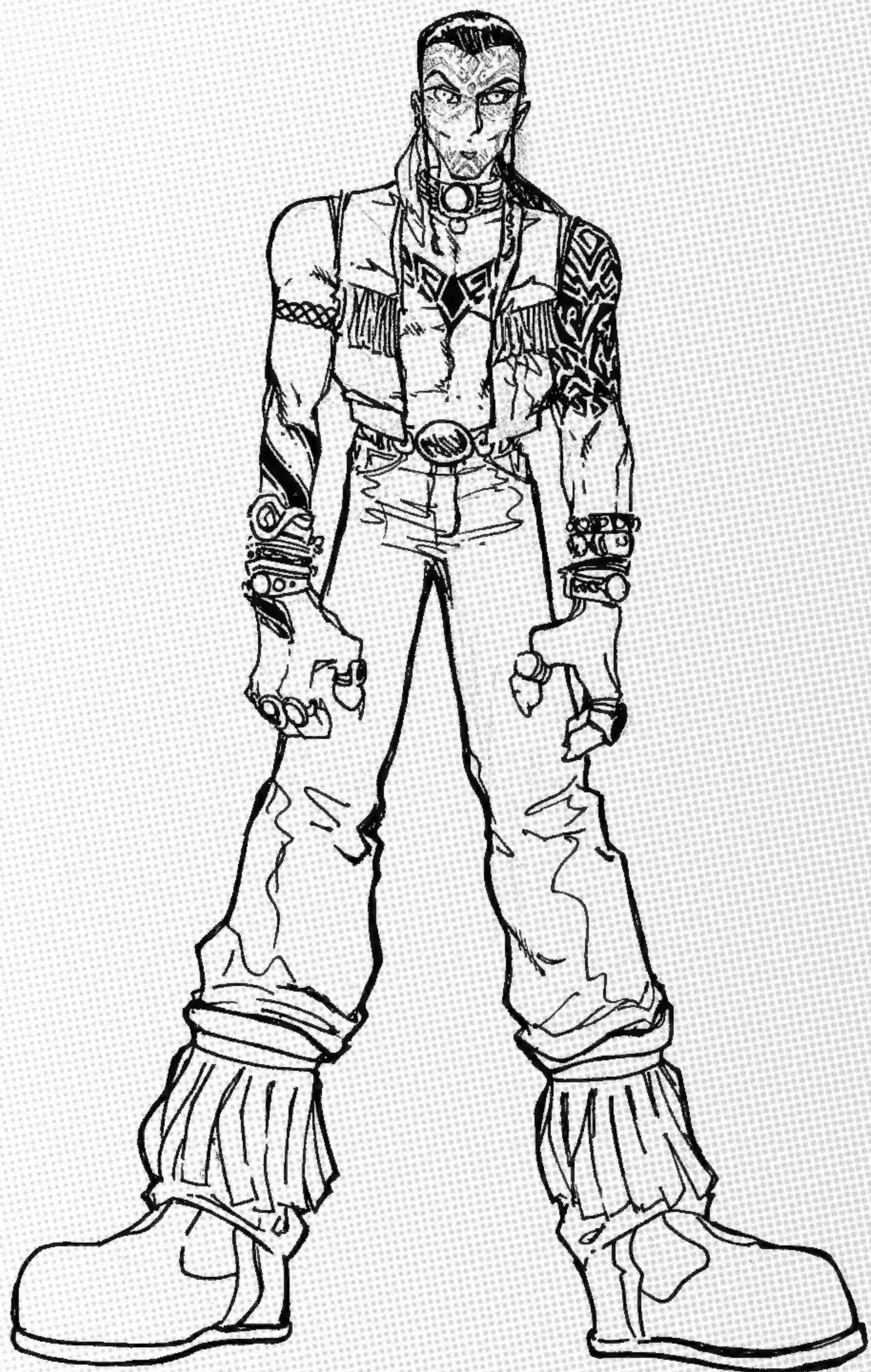
THANKS FOR EVERYTHING!

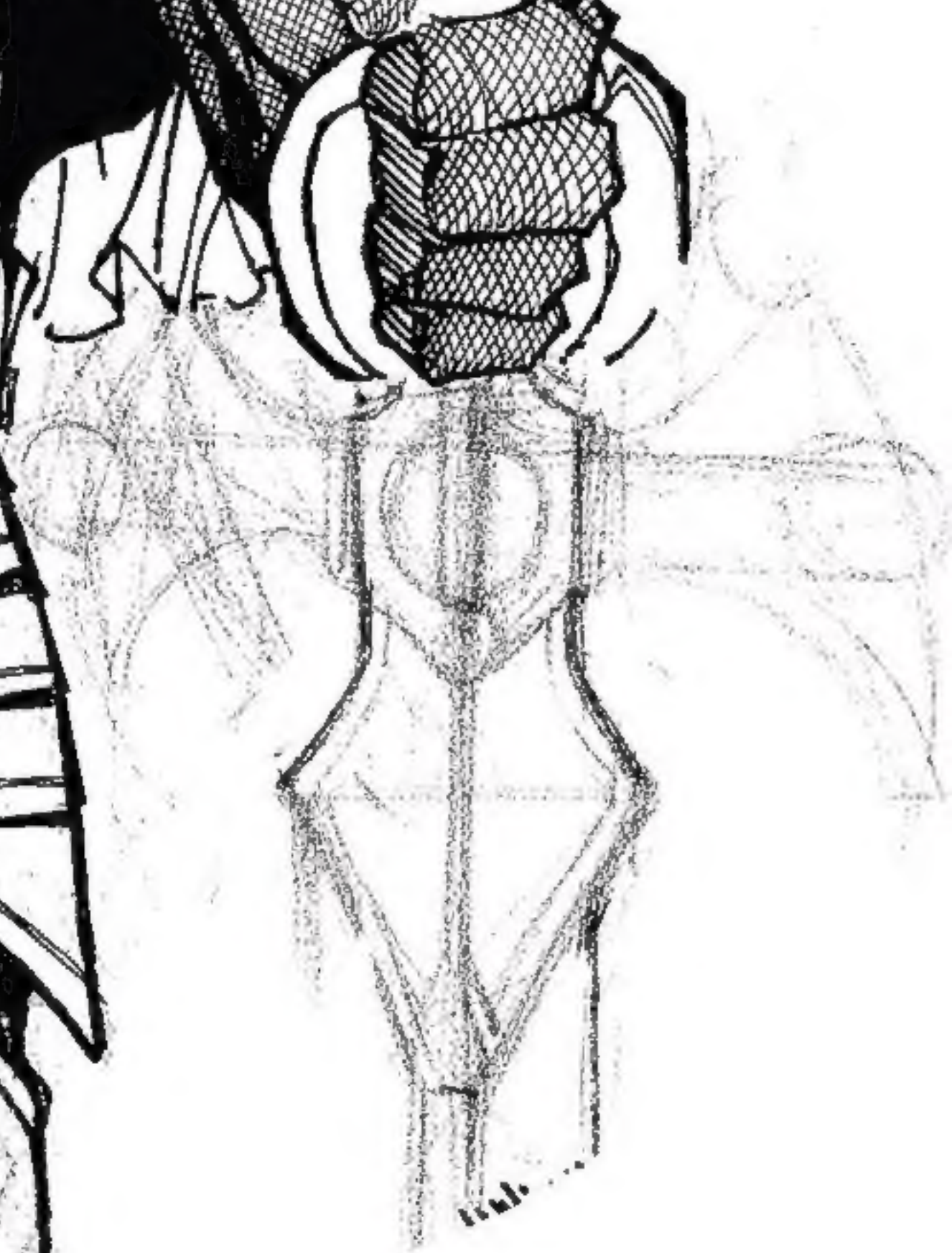
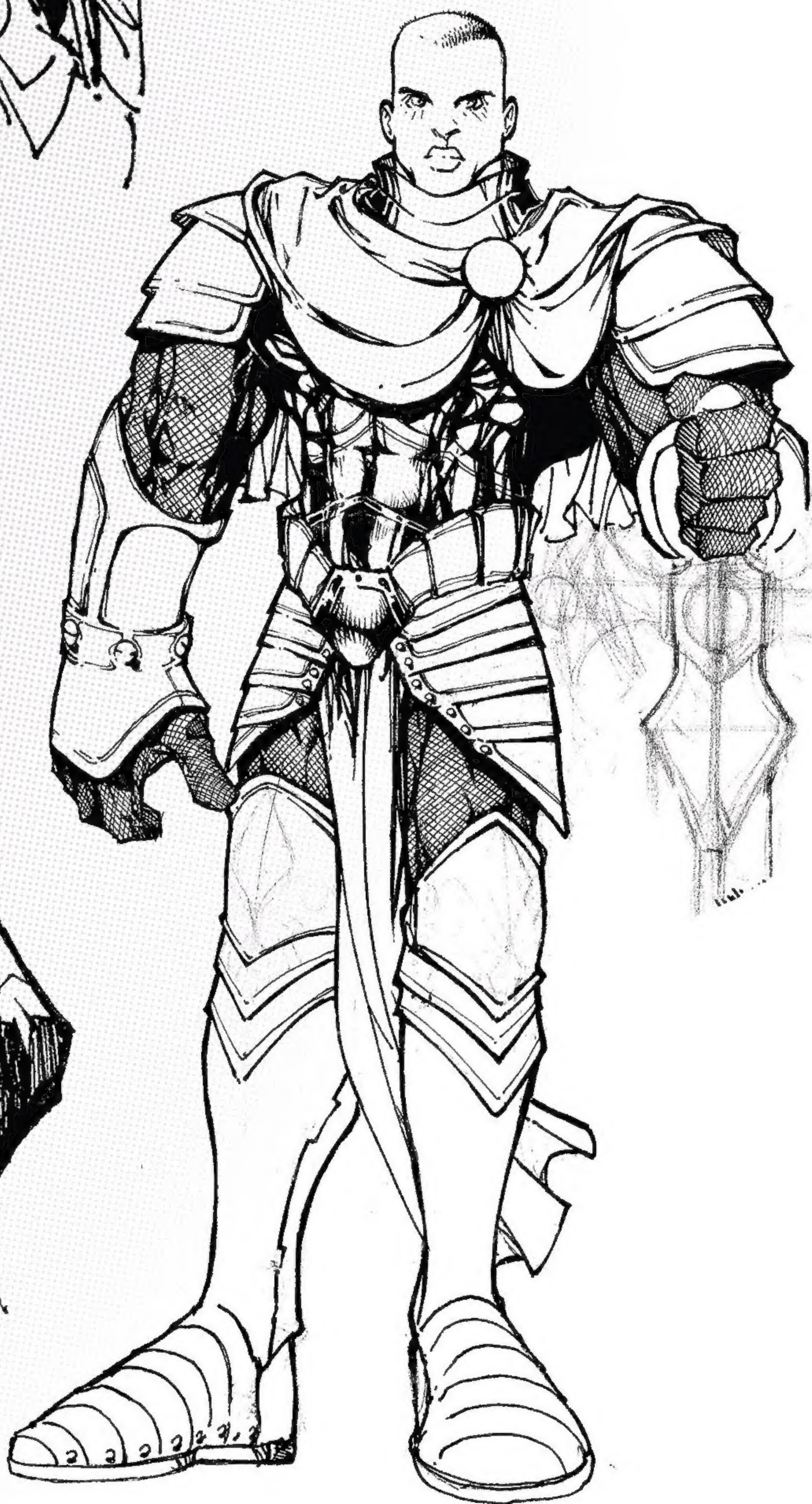
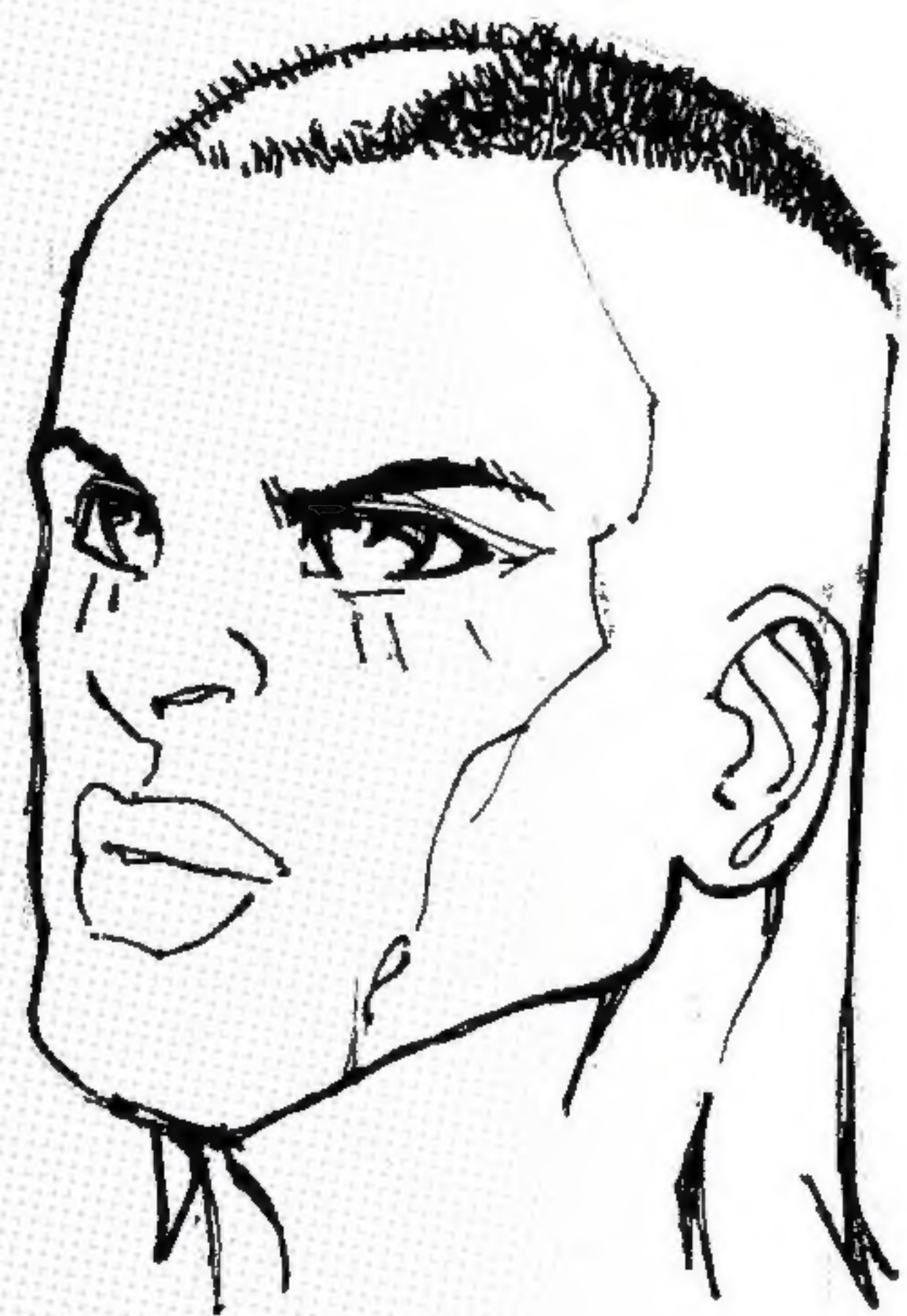




ORIGINAL CHARACTER DESIGNS BY
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